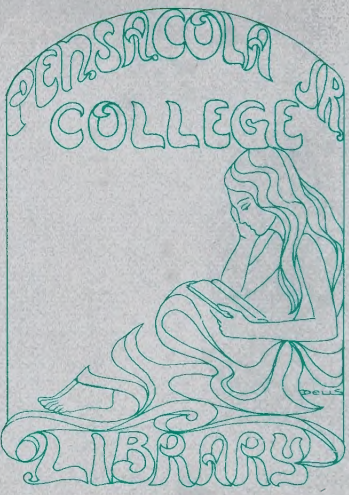

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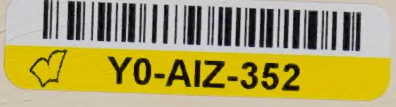
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THE

CONTINUITY OF LETTERS

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BY

JOHN BAILEY

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TO

GEORGE MACAULAY TREVELYAN

IN

ADMIRATION AND AFFECTION

PREFACE

THE following Essays and Lectures are a selection from a good many which I have written during the last few years. Three of them, those on Shakespeare's *Histories*, *Prometheus in Poetry*, and *Don Quixote* have not been printed before. Of the others, *Life and Art in English Poetry*, which has appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, was the first of the Lectures which I delivered at Cambridge during the winter of 1921–2 when I held the office of Clark Lecturer in English Literature at Trinity College; *The Grand Style* was a contribution to the volume of *Essays and Studies* issued by The English Association in 1911 and published by the Clarendon Press; *Poetry and Commonplace* was the British Academy's Warton Lecture on English Poetry for 1919 and has been printed by the Academy; the essays on Wordsworth and Thackeray originally appeared in the *Quarterly Review*; and that entitled *Napoleon in Poetry* in the Napoleon Centenary Supplement issued by *The Times* in 1921.

I have to thank the proprietors of these publications for giving me leave to reprint my papers. Most of them have received a few corrections or additions, and a long Appendix, dealing with recent discoveries, has been added to the essay on Wordsworth.

I have ventured to give the volume the title of *The*

Continuity of Letters. I am very conscious that it is a larger title than such a book has any right to. But it represents a doctrine in which I profoundly believe and one which is several times insisted on in these essays; and I hope that it is not altogether inappropriate to a volume which, while dealing primarily with some aspects of the English literature of the last three hundred years, attempts often to illustrate it by allusions to the literature of other times and other countries.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	Life and Art in English Poetry . . .	1
2.	The Grand Style: An Attempt at a Definition	21
3.	Shakespeare's Histories	52
4.	Prometheus in Poetry	103
5.	Don Quixote: A Tercentenary Lecture .	139
6.	A Mistaken View of Wordsworth . .	168
7.	Thackeray and the English Novel . .	193
8.	Napoleon in Poetry	218
9.	Poetry and Commonplace	242

LIFE AND ART IN ENGLISH POETRY[1]

I CANNOT begin what I have to say to-day without allowing myself a few rather personal words. I hope it is not necessary to tell you how sensible I am of the high honour which the college has done me in appointing me to hold this office, and how conscious, almost painfully conscious, I am of my unfitness to stand in a place which has been occupied by such men as Sir Walter Raleigh, Professor W. P. Ker, and the brilliant classical and English scholar who was the first holder of the King Edward VII Chair of English Literature. There is never any use in spending time over one's unfitness for any kind of work : the only thing to do is to make oneself as fit as one can and think no more about it. But there is something else. It is not merely a matter of unfitness. It is a matter of strangeness. Part of the pride, and part also of the alarm, which I felt when I received the Master's letter offering me this lectureship came from surprise and pleasure in the thought that one so entirely a creature of Oxford as I am should be asked to lecture at Cambridge. But after to-day I shall presume to consider myself not so entirely of Oxford as before, but now a little, at any rate, of Cambridge too. I shall not in future allow myself to be so humbled by that array of Cambridge poets with which the Cambridge man is wont to crush any tendency to complacence on the part of Oxonians of literary tastes. Having now at least a temporary foothold in Cambridge, I shall lay claim to my proper fraction of the reflected glory of Milton and Wordsworth and the rest : and even when my brief connexion with

[1] The opening Lecture delivered on the 10th November 1921 by the Clark Lecturer in English Literature at Trinity College, Cambridge.

this place is over I shall, I hope, have memories and gratitudes which will almost make me shrink from so much as remembering a reply which, when still in the position of a mere undiluted Oxonian, I once devised to silence that Cambridge taunt of which I spoke. It cannot be denied, no doubt, that Gray said ugly things about Cambridge, or even—dare I mention so profane a fact in this place?—that Dryden, Wordsworth, and Byron went so far in moments of eccentricity or anti-mathematical exaltation as to utter the ugly wish that they had been at Oxford; and the fact is, perhaps, a justifiable Oxford parry to that difficult Cambridge thrust. But I shall now be more inclined to remember that it by no means represents the last word to be said about the true feelings of those poets. Dryden's, for instance, was notoriously rather a venal Muse, and it is not to be forgotten that his painful contrast between Thebes and Athens occurs in verses addressed to the University of Oxford, and is naturally tinctured by that gratitude which, we know, has its own lively expectations, and naturally does what it can to put them in the way of fulfilment. Moreover, in estimating the value of his

> Oxford to him a dearer name shall be
> Than his own mother University;
> Thebes did his green unknowing youth engage:
> He chooses Athens in his riper age—

we cannot forget what he says of another prologue and epilogue addressed to Oxford:

> 'I hear they have succeeded, and by the event your lordship will judge how easy it is to pass anything upon an university, and how gross flattery the learned will endure.'

And as to Gray, his life is the best answer to his words. It is no use describing Cambridge as 'a silly, dirty place' if, without any call of duty or business, you show your love for it by choosing to spend the best part of your life there. Of Byron I say nothing, except that, so far as I remember,

Cambridge fares no worse at the hands of his universal helter-skelter mockery than every place he ever lived in, with the possible exceptions of Newstead and Harrow. And as to Wordsworth, was it not at Cambridge that he got drunk, and did he ever pay the same honour to any other place?

No one, then, who comes to speak of English literature, and particularly of English poetry, in this place can forget that Cambridge can claim to number among her sons the greatest English poet who was ever at a university at all; *and* the poet most loved of poets, loved of Milton, loved of Pope, loved of Wordsworth, loved of Keats; *and* the poet of the best-known poem in our language; *and* the poet who, far more than any other English poet, has changed the lives and characters of his readers so that he has become a kind of religion (we do not speak of Miltonians or Keatsians, but we do speak of Wordsworthians, almost as we speak of Wesleyans or Franciscans); *and* the poet who has as easily surpassed all our poets in the splendour of his contemporary and still surviving European fame as in the heroic beauty of his death. And these are only five in a long and glorious line. The function of the Clark Lecturer is to lecture on English literature. He is in a very free position, as I understand, his duties having, wisely as it seems to me, been left very vague and undefined. He is the swallow of a single summer; and no one has cared to try to control the casual flights of so brief a visitor. But I suppose that part, and a principal part, of the idea of the lectureship was, and is, that its passing holders should give their hearers, not so much their learning, if they have it, as their experiences in literature—what was Jules Lemaître's phrase?—their adventures in that perpetual voyage of discovery across the ocean of literature which is the life of a lover of letters: to tell their tale and recount their memories of the storms and calms they have encountered; the barren islands and the fruitful; the friendly people and the savages—perhaps we

should rather say the congenial and the uncongenial; to go over again some of the incidents of a ten years' or perhaps thirty years' voyage, in which at one moment they were holding their breath as they huddled in dread under the thunder and lightning of *Lear* or *Agamemnon*, and at another feasting or lying at ease in the sun as they rested for a while in such happy Phaeacian islands as the *Odes of Horace*, the *Fables of La Fontaine*, or the *Autumn*, the *Maia*, the *Hymn to Pan*, of our own wonderful Keats.

I believe that custom, and I think not an unwise custom, prescribes that a stranger should devote his first appearance, not to any special subject or anything of detail, but to what may be called general conversation, as in social life we expect a new acquaintance to talk first at large before he presumes on intimacy or speaks much of his own special subject or interests. The first thing is to get to know each other, and there is only one topic we are certain to have in common, and that is human life. Indeed, human life is the proper preliminary subject of any book or course of lectures about literature. The varieties of metre, the relations of one writer to another, the comparison of the Greek language with the Latin or of English with French, all these and scores of other subjects like them are well enough and, indeed, important enough. But they come after, not before: they are not the great first subject of all which is the relation of literature to life. All the arts deal with life: but none draws so closely from it, as none so intimately and powerfully affects it, as literature, and especially poetry, the highest and most excellent form of literature. Literature is life: the life of a man: of the man who makes it; but not only of him, because also of his race: and not only of his race, but also of his age: and not only of his age or of his race, but also, if it be great literature, of all the races and all the ages of humanity. It must be at once individual life and universal. If Homer contained nothing but what was abstractedly or

universally true he would be dull. He must have, as he has, many things which surprise, amuse, even, perhaps, disgust us who live in so different an age and country. He must have things which are peculiar to the Greeks of his day, and even things peculiar to himself alone among the Greeks. Without that he would not have individuality or even nationality: and without individuality and nationality there is no life in literature, whatever some people may think there can be in politics. But if he were only Homer or only Greek he would be something worse than dull: he would be dead: dead for us because there would be no link between us; dead because the life of poetry needs an immortal and universal element without which its lease of life is a very short one. A poet cannot carry himself and his own age and their idiosyncrasies and peculiarities down the centuries unless he provides them with the elixir of immortality which is universal human truth. One touch of nature as it was once in Greece, is to-day in England, and will be a thousand years hence in both, and we know at once that we are at home. I wonder whether we could endure the tediousness, inconsistencies, and unrealities of the Homeric gods, or, say, if you like, the impossibility for a plain man of arriving at the geography of the Homeric house, or understanding the affair of the shooting competition in the 21st *Odyssey*, if we never came upon such things as these words of Odysseus to Nausicaa:

> σοὶ δὲ θεοὶ τόσα δοῖεν ὅσα φρεσὶ σῇσι μενοινᾷς,
> ἄνδρα τε καὶ οἶκον καὶ ὁμοφροσύνην ὀπάσειαν
> ἐσθλήν· οὐ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ γε κρεῖσσον καὶ ἄρειον
> ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχητον
> ἀνὴρ ἠδὲ γυνή.

for which we may find a kind of translation—how many centuries after?—in our own Chaucer:

> Who coulde telle, but he had wedded be,
> The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee
> That is betwixe an housbonde and his wyf?

How like it is and how unlike : somehow a little more in it and a great deal less, with the differences between Greece and England, the ancient world and the mediaeval, and, one must add, between ripeness, the assured certainty of maturity, and a certain naivety as of a charming child : and yet with the essential likeness that belongs to all men, especially sane and healthy men, as belonging to one family.

These things in an instant take away all strangeness : while we listen to Homer we are in England : rather we know ourselves to be of a larger country than either Greece or England : and the sense of largeness sends through us a flow of happiness and sympathy which together are perfect content. I said it took away all strangeness. But I think when you look into it I was wrong. Rather such a revelation of likeness, such parallels between poets so different, stir us with wonder, not only at the beauty of human thought and feeling and speech : not only at the intimacy of the union between truth and beauty : but also, and perhaps above all, at the discovery that their perfect utterance at once witnesses to a universal kinship of men which defies time and place.

I said that literature was life. Yes—but it is life dealt with in a particular way. It is life and art: life as art handles it, re-shapes it, re-creates it into new birth. A mere statement of fact, such as ' Men have generally greater bodily strength than women ' : or ' The oak lives longer than the elm ', is not literature ; it is just science : which is fact as it is in itself, untouched by imagination or emotion, unaffected by the human element. But literature is the fact, not as it is in itself, but as it is seen and coloured by human eyes, felt by human feeling, re-shaped by human imagination. That is because literature is art. For art which is content with a statement of fact is not art at all. Literature, then, is a marriage of life and art : it is art acting on life and life on art in a union which is so intimate that the elements cannot be separated except in thought. But both must always be present, and

the absence of either, even such weakness of either as prevents it from playing its full part, is at once felt. Or, to put it the other way, the over-preponderance of either is fatal to the balance or harmony which is of the essence of literature, and therefore fatal to itself. The truth is that each element in the union—art and life alike—is only saved in the way of that tremendous saying of the Gospel, by being lost, by losing itself. Each is lost by being too carefully and lovingly saved. If literature concentrates exclusively on life, if it forgets everything in the desire to reform life, if it gives to conduct, not three-fourths, but the whole of its attention—as sometimes in Wordsworth, Arnold, and even Shelley : or if it makes the fact, not an instrument, but an end in itself, and the only end, as in Zola's descriptive encyclopaedias of money and labour and religion ; it ceases in each case to be literature and defeats its own end : we neither listen to its sermons nor remember its descriptions. Its exaggerated interest in life has prevented it from having any influence on life. If, on the other hand, it be so intent on art, and so divorced from life, that it gives all its energies to turning phrases, concocting conceits, or accomplishing curious and difficult metrical feats, as in so many Italian *canzoni* and French *ballades* of the Renascence, so many English sonnet sequences and pretty but empty lyrics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so many *vers de société* of all periods and countries, then it only shows how dead is that art which exercises itself upon a vacuum in which there is neither the truth nor the feeling which make up life.

Yet among people who are ignorant of the arts there is no delusion so common as that which supposes art to be an affair of ornament and fiction, unconcerned and unconnected with use and life. Simple people suppose that an unadorned house cannot be a fine one ; and that a plain piece of writing cannot be literature. They are even rather apt, when they read writers of perfect simplicity like Cervantes, Bunyan, or

Swift, to suppose that if they wrote a book that is how they would write, not having the necessary genius to attempt to write like a Euphuist or a Précieux. It is said that when Lord Roberts undertook to write a book on his forty-four years in India he spent many laborious weeks on his first chapter, and then submitted it to a man of letters whom he knew. The verdict was that the book promised to be quite interesting, 'but', asked the man of letters, 'why have you spun it out with all those similes and far-fetched literary allusions ?' 'Good God !' said Lord Roberts. 'Doesn't one have to do that ? Those things have given me ever so many sleepless nights. I thought a real book would never do without them.' The advice not only saved the author much labour : it saved the book from failure and contempt. For if life without art is apt to be tedious, art without life is intolerable. Lord Roberts's book may not be fine literature, but it is at any rate a book that can be read.

I think this action and reaction may be traced all down the history of our poetry. I am afraid I am the very opposite of well-read in our early poetry. But from what I have read about it, and, with difficulty, of it, I think it is safe to say that it has more of life than art in it. This is, I suppose, the usual weakness of all primitive literatures. Man can hardly help being interested in observing himself and his own life, and drawing his conclusions from what he observes : so that a people will have a thousand proverbs before they have one poem. Sancho Panza is many centuries older than his creator, or than his companion in immortality, the more poetic Don Quixote. We are aware of ourselves and other human beings as soon as we are aware of anything, while many of us—perhaps the majority—pass the whole of life without ever being aware of art at all. *Ars longa, vita brevis :* and life takes revenge for its shortness by interesting us at once, and interesting all of us, even the most primitive, simple, and uneducated people. So Early English literature

was often full of truth and moral insight, but, being deficient in art, failed to be a permanent factor in English life. Its own defects, for which it was responsible, united with the change of language, for which it was not, to make it unreadable, and to leave it where it has remained—in an antiquarian and linguistic backwater. The stream got very thin, clogged sometimes by defects of the opposite sort, and wasting itself in the backwaters of ingenuity: echoes of Provence and Northern France, echoes that were only echoes, exercises in imitation, art divorced from life, the dilettante entertainment of the idleness of courts and castles. Then at last it widened out into the noble reach which we associate with the name of Chaucer, the first English poet in whom the equipoise of art and life begins to be seen in something like perfection. Here at last was a man who understood life and had mastered his difficult art: who had something to say and knew how to say it.

We can never overpraise Chaucer. What we should have been without him no one can say. He first made us European: he gathered his subjects and learnt his art from the greatest European masters of his own day and of the days before him, and from those ancients who had been their masters: and he first brought to the work of poetry a genius for living and observing and thinking and writing which enabled him to deal freely both with life and with the art of his masters, and to make a new creation of his own. And there is another thing. He is the first to sound the free, fresh, natural, and easy note which we think of as modern, though many of the Greeks and some of the Romans had it. But the Middle Age had largely lost it. There are exceptions to all rules of course; but as a whole the utterance of the Middle Age is choked with pedantry and clumsiness. Before Chaucer Christianity had produced only one truly great poet of the order which the intelligent reader of any age or country instantly recognizes as belonging to all. For I do not think

that even Petrarch is that. Dante stands alone. And Dante's position is peculiar. Mighty as is his genius, vast as his learning, exalted perhaps beyond all others as his spirit, he looks backward rather than forward. So far as I know the great literature of the world, I should suppose him to be, without rival or question, the greatest poet of the greatest of all subjects. But his task is not to anticipate the world which was coming ; it is to sum up in one mighty work of art the whole life, learning, and politics of a world which was rapidly passing away. Nowhere is his genius better shown than in the way he triumphed over the narrow limitations which he imposed on himself. On every page of Milton one feels the hampering effects on poetry of a strictly defined logical creed. Dante's creed was a hundred times more detailed than Milton's : and it was further limited by philosophical explanations of every article it contained. Yet his genius can carry all this heavy baggage with him into the empyrean of poetry. Still, heavy baggage it is : most of us have little to do to-day with the ingenious subtleties of the School philosophy, or even with a local Hell and Purgatory, or with such questions as the penalty paid by children for dying unbaptized. Dante's great poem is largely an apotheosis, the most magnificent in the world. But, after all, apotheosis is for things and persons which on earth are dead. I am not forgetting for a moment the eternal truth of the human faith and Divine love which fill the poem, nor the delight which it so often exhibits in the works and ways of man and in the beautiful things among which he passes his earthly life : nor, again, the consummate force, brevity, and decision of its style : without these the poem would not be the thing of immortality which it unquestionably is. But, nevertheless, even these things in part, and all others in entirety, are given a strictly mediaeval clothing, and to move from them to Chaucer is to move from the old world to the new, and even, in one sense, from darkness to light.

But the light was soon extinguished. The school of Chaucer was only a school: none of the scholars in it ever came to be masters. The art of Chaucer had no equal till Spenser came, nearly two centuries later: and as to the wide knowledge of Chaucer, his combined shrewdness, humour, sympathy, his common sense, in both the meanings of the word 'sense', that is, his understanding of his fellow-men and his feeling for them, his power of entering both into their point of view and into their feelings, they were not to be seen again till the full two centuries produced Shakespeare.

Before the *Faery Queen* was written, Europe and, in its wake, England had been transformed by two mighty movements, the Renascence of the ancient world, and the Reformation which was at first mainly the ally of the Renascence and later mainly its enemy. The first effort of the Reformation was directed against mediaevalism, the follies of the schools, the idleness and degradation of the monasteries, the worldliness and corruption of the Papacy and the Hierarchy. That phase is best seen, perhaps, in Erasmus, who was heartily in sympathy with the new learning. But as the Reformation became more Jewish and more Puritan, i. e. more exclusively interested in conduct, and the Renascence became more intellectual, i. e. more interested in free speculation of every kind, they necessarily parted company; and the last occasion on which they appear in perfect harmony is perhaps the publication of the pre-Civil War poems of Milton. But this is to anticipate. What I was coming to say was that both the art and the life which we find in Spenser and Shakespeare were necessarily very different from those of Chaucer. Chaucer was as much in advance of his age as a poet can be; but no man, or at least no poet or artist, whatever may be true of a man of science, can get out of his own age altogether. Lover of light and freedom as Chaucer is, he is still a man of the Middle Age which loved neither. We can set no limits to what he might

have been if he had lived two hundred years later. But we must take him as he is, and take him with thankfulness. And as he is, part of his delightfulness is due to a certain mental naivety, one may almost say childishness, the childishness of his age, which even he could not escape. But, for good or for evil, with the Renascence and Reformation we put away childish things. No one was ever saner than Chaucer, but he could not have the large and rational view of life which the great Elizabethans owed to the Renascence. And he could not have the profound moral seriousness which all the churches and religious parties, including that which it assailed, owed to the Reformation. In spite of his occasional indecency, he is fundamentally on the side of the angels. But a faith and morals which are inherited and undisputed cannot have the heat of conviction of those but just emerging from a struggle of life and death. You may say, and say with truth, that we know nothing of the religious opinions of Shakespeare, and little of those of most of the Elizabethan writers. Explicit religious utterances belong rather to the next generation which begins with Donne. But, nevertheless, can it be denied that in the great writers of the Elizabethan age, and notably in Shakespeare, there is a pervading sense of the greatness of the moral issues of life, a moral seriousness, which there was not, and could not be, in Chaucer ? Life has become an affair for grown men ; not merely, as in Chaucer, a thing to be accepted, played with, enjoyed, suffered, but a thing to be understood and to be conquered : difficult of comprehension, requiring all our thought, difficult of mastery, requiring an unceasing vigilance of will and conscience. This is truer, of course, of Shakespeare than of Spenser. In fact, Spenser is, in many ways, one of those who look back to the age behind them. He is decidedly more mediaeval than either of his masters, Ariosto or Tasso. Ariosto's story is almost as mediaevally involved as Spenser's : but in himself there are none of the limita-

tions of archaism : and beside him Spenser appears clumsy, laborious, and imperfectly civilized. Tasso's subject is the mediaeval one of the Crusades, but he conceives it as a whole, and gives sanity to its fairy tales ; while neither artistic unity nor human sanity is among the characteristics of the Middle Age, or even—certainly not unity—of the *Faery Queen*. That poem has the mediaeval weakness of meandering endlessly towards a goal which no one can guess at, and which, in fact, is never reached. It lacks lucidity and order, two of the greatest lessons which the new world was learning of the classics. In these respects it remains in the stage of artistic childhood : the story seems often to wander at its own will, hardly directed at all by the poet's mind. Indeed in both art and life it is largely a mediaeval survivor. One of the most striking characteristics of the Middle Age is that it appears to have felt little objection to tediousness or to endless monotony of repetition. So in the *Faery Queen*. The personal combats of Homer soon become rather wearisome to the modern reader ; but those which repeat themselves again and again throughout the *Faery Queen* are infinitely more so. They have far less variety and far less vigour, and the treatment of human character is on the whole narrowly mediaeval : the virtues and vices are limited to those of chivalry, such as personal bravery, chastity, hospitality to strangers, and their opposites. We miss the God's plenty of Chaucer, with its pell-mell of human life as we know it in all its shades and gradations.

Yet if both in art and life the *Faery Queen* seems partly a step backward when we compare it with the *Canterbury Tales*, not only that great poem but other works of Spenser show that it was not for nothing he lived after and not before the great intellectual and religious movements of the early sixteenth century. For instance, one may like the change or regret it ; but, for good or for evil, he is no longer *naïve*. He first for England, as Ronsard first for France, strikes

a note, the note of the *os magna sonans*, greatness finding great utterance, which the Middle Age could not sound in either country. The very first stanzas of the *Faery Queen* give us that note :

Helpe then, O holy virgin ! chiefe of nyne,
Thy weaker Novice to performe thy will ;
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne
The antique rolles, which there lye hidden still,
Of Faerie knights, and fayrest Tanaquill,
Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long
Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
That I must rue his undeserved wrong :
O, helpe thou my weake wit, and sharpen my dull tong !

To this height he again and again rises out of the tedious prolixities and incredible adventures of his knights and ladies. He has not had the formal courage to cast off the old clothes of mediaeval romance, but he is not blind to what was buried under it, the high adventure of noble living; and he can picture it with a largeness and accompany it with a music of which the Middle Age knew nothing, which, in fact, could not come till the Middle Age had been universalized, intellectualized, and humanized in the atmosphere of the Greek and Roman classics. And his immortal stanza ? Is not the suave and gracious perfection of its harmony a thing inconceivable in the Middle Age ? Whatever Spenser had not learnt of the new world, he had learnt the lesson that literature is a fine art ; that its expression must be a thing of order and beauty and delight, not a thing harsh, crabbed, casual ; and of that lesson few of his successors have been better masters. Their especial delight in him—as we find it recorded in the lives of Milton, Cowley, Pope, Wordsworth, Keats—is the best tribute to the fine quality of his art : he is, in this matter, *il maestro di color che sanno*, the craftsman admired of craftsmen, the poets' poet.

In some respects his advance on the Middle Age, both in life and art, is more remarkable in his minor poems than in

the *Faery Queen*. For instance, in the *Hymn of Heavenly Love* we get an anticipation of the majesty of Milton :

> Before this worlds great frame, in which al things
> Are now contained, found any being-place,
> Ere flitting Time could wag his eyas wings
> About that mightie bound which doth embrace
> The rolling Spheres, and parts their houres by space,
> That High Eternall Powre, which now doth move
> In all these things, mov'd in it selfe by love.

Here, as in several other of the minor poems, and especially in every line of the *Epithalamium*, is art which, for the first time in English, takes equal rank with that of the ancient classics and the great Italians. Chaucer had a clearer view of life than Spenser, and he had more ease and humour ; but, on the whole, he loves the ground : he could not maintain himself for long on the heights of poetry, with mind and imagination and emotion all uplifted above their common level, and finding an utterance which fuses them all in a satisfying whole. Spenser was the first Englishman who could do that.

Since his death more than 300 wonderful years have passed over our poetry. I have no time now, of course, to speak even of the greatest names which adorn these centuries. But there is this to be said. When Spenser appeared by Chaucer's side men who knew what poetry was knew that England had taken her place among those nations which could claim to have produced great poetry. Chaucer had brought us, as I said, the sane and liberal view of life. Spenser gave us the exalted view of it without which the poetic treatment of life is not complete, and he gave us the noble art which makes a high music of all observation, thought, and feeling. With Spenser, English poetry was seen to have exhibited all the qualities of great poetry. But within little more than half a century after his death it was seen to have done more than that. And long before the full century had elapsed that generous poet who was the first or at least the second of our

great critics of poetry had definitely recognized that we in England were already possessed of two poets who not only belonged, like Spenser, to the world of great poetry, but were among those few mighty ones who sit in that world—to apply the phrase of one of them—on sainted seats as its enthroned gods. Dryden's prompt recognition of the splendour of the genius of Shakespeare and Milton—both as unlike him as they are unlike each other—is one of the greatest of recorded triumphs of literary judgement. It would have seemed madness outside England, if anybody had heard of it. But it was the truth, and after another hundred years or so all Europe had come to see that it was. I imagine that neither France nor Italy nor Spain nor Germany, whatever they might claim for themselves, would allow that any of the other three possessed more than one poet who ranked above, or even on a level with, Shakespeare and Milton.

However, it is not our business—nor a very profitable one for any one—to be awarding first classes or seconds in an imaginary world-competition of poets. Shakespeare and Milton are anyhow great enough for an Englishman to feel it to be about his highest glory that their language is his mother tongue. But observe this. The mighty pair on whose shoulders we English climb these heights are as unlike each other as two poets well can be. No doubt they were also as unlike as two men can be, but that is not the present point. What I am now concerned with is the poetic contrast. Shakespeare, chronologically the third great name in our poetic annals, gave what the second, Spenser, could not give—the universality of life, not only its height and depth but its infinite variety. He completes the gift of Chaucer. It is, on the other hand, Spenser's gift which Milton completes. Milton is, without rival or question, the greatest artist of our race. Indeed, it is quite arguable that his poetry, which is, very nearly all of it, of consummate

perfection, is in craftsmanship, if not quite so certainly in design, the greatest work of art in the whole world of poetry. One test of poetry as art is whether you can alter the words it uses. How many times do you find one that you can alter in Milton? Is even Virgil more final than he is? That is why they are of all poets the easiest to retain in the memory: their word is always the only possible word when once you have been shown it. Well, that is Milton, the magnificent craftsman, the self-conscious, deliberate, laborious genius, who always knew what he was doing, and why he was doing it, who put purpose and character into every word he uttered, and was never for a moment easy-going, indifferent, impartial or amused. Could there be a man less like Shakespeare? The one as we know him is all art and will: the other—I might almost say, but that it is difficult and dangerous to talk of limitations in connexion with Shakespeare—is all experience and sympathy, entering into everything, accepting everything, never imposing himself upon anything: the one is all intension, the other all extension: the one, we may say, exhibits the embodied concentration of art, the other the diffused fluidity and mobility of life. There is a vast quantity of life in Milton, and there are ever-recurring moments of the loveliest art in Shakespeare. But there can be no doubt, I think, that in Shakespeare it is the fullness and variety of life which is the dominant impression, and in Milton the intensity and rarity of art.

So those two sides of the ever-shifting balance reach their extremes in these two supreme men. But life and art are both inexhaustible, and not even Shakespeare and Milton could exhaust them. Both of them are for ever being born again, the same and not the same. You cannot separate, of course, except in thought the two elements which are strangely united to make what we call poetry, any more than we can see body apart from soul, or soul apart from body.

But all poetry has them both ; the criticism of life on which one great critic laid all his stress, the art on which others have laid all theirs. And whether we think of them apart or in union we can see them changing and being reborn as the generations go by. And the method of rebirth is, if you look at it, always the same. At any rate, it always thinks of itself in the same way, as a return to nature. Life as the great Elizabethans saw it is not life as the men of the Restoration saw it, nor is the art of Shakespeare the art of Pope. What has happened ? In each case, in art and in life, what the new generation thinks has happened is a return to nature. The extravagances of the Shakespearean drama, the pontifical splendours and sublimities of the Miltonian epic, themselves an escape to nature out of mediaevalism, are to be exchanged for life as you see it in your own house and your neighbour's : and poetry is to speak the language as well as live the life of ordinary men. That is what Dryden and Pope thought they were doing, and partly were. But let two or three generations go by and what has happened ? That which was introduced as the natural has become the artificial : what was meant to be human life has become merely polite society : we seem to have escaped from the wild forest of romance only to shut ourselves up in a London parlour, and from the absurdities of a world where everybody seemed to walk on stilts to the insipidities of one in which nobody would soil his fine shoes by so much as walking at all : from a language full of daring flights of every kind to one which had sacrificed all the colour and energy and warmth of life on the altar of a cool correctness. And so we get every kind of return to nature at once : Cowper's return to the country, Burns's return to the plain people, Blake's return to spirit, Wordsworth's return to all three, spirit and people and country at once. All are conceived as a return to nature. And so is even the work of the great Romantics. Scott and Byron and Keats knew that nature has colour

and detail and bears the marks of its past: all things that had been forgotten in the abstract generalizing of the eighteenth century. And now another hundred years have passed and we see the same thing once more. The dominant Victorian figure was Tennyson, the poetic child, partly of Wordsworth and partly of Keats: though perhaps he owed more to the Latin and Greek classics than to any Englishman. Still he carried on the tradition which to him as to them seemed to be founded on life and nature. And now our contemporary Georgian poets are once more returning to nature: finding the Tennysonian life and art conventional, and insisting on their right to rebaptize poetry in a bath of naturalness. And, of course, some of them are exercising that right in such a way (I am not blaming them: it is the inevitable swing of the pendulum) as to be certain to produce another reaction to another naturalness, which will have for its business to assert that common sense is just as natural as violence, decency as indecency, English as slang. So the eternal quest of *la vraie vérité* goes on: in poetry, in painting, sometimes even in music. And the artists of each successive generation are for ever looking for what is not to be found: a method which can make life art and yet leave it unchanged. But art and science are not the same thing. Art cannot touch without transforming: and life as shown by art is never life as it is to the intellect: it is always something recreated, born of a marriage of the fact and the imagination; of the artist's temperament embracing so much of life as is patient of his embrace: a process which begins afresh and produces a different result with each artist, as no one man repeats another. The irony of the business is that each artist claims to be giving, and perhaps really wishes to give, the bare truth of life itself; while the more power he puts into his effort, the less, in one way, he succeeds, for the more he has in him, the more he himself colours and shapes the result, the more he

transforms and recreates nature, till what he meant for nature becomes more and more himself.

That is the delight and mystery of art, and above all of poetry. The very business of the poet is to seek what can never be found, the truth as it is in itself. Like the rest of us, he spends his life in trying to escape himself. But, like the rest of us, he fails. He fails because, like us, he brings himself into everything he does. Only his failure is different from ours. For the self which we cannot escape is often only a degradation or contradiction of the truth of which we have a fitful vision. His—so far as he is indeed a poet—is that part of the truth which did not exist before him, which could not have been without him, which it was his gift and work to reveal, or rather to create. For the process of creation is never ended : and what the poet does when he seeks to reveal a truth which is, is to bring himself to bear on it, and so to create a truth which never was before. Poetry is life and art : and it is in seeking to rediscover the old that art is for ever bringing to birth the new. The primal act of creation was to bring order out of chaos : and the order was life. And so it has always been. It is true, not in any rhetorical sense but literally, that the poet and every artist follows the method of the Divine Maker. His spirit which is art breathes upon the chaos of life ; and behold there is, first, order : and then again another and higher kind of life.

THE GRAND STYLE

AN ATTEMPT AT A DEFINITION

'ALL dispute turns upon difference of definition,' says Mr. Saintsbury in the essay on 'Shakespeare and the Grand Style' contributed to last year's[1] volume of 'Essays and Studies by members of the English Association'. Certainly, there is no case in which this is more likely than in the matter of the Grand Style. Our aesthetic perceptions are in themselves so difficult to realize and apprehend clearly, and our aesthetic vocabulary is so inadequate and uncertain, that definitions in matters of art are the most difficult of all definitions to make, and, when made, run exceptional risk of meaning one thing to their maker and another to his readers. Yet if criticism is to be a living thing we must, as far as possible, understand what we are talking about. Is it possible to get nearer to a definite understanding of a phrase so large and vague as this of 'the Grand Style', nearer than is got in the common employment of it in newspapers, nearer than, as I venture to think, Mr. Saintsbury gets in his essay?

I need scarcely say that I do not presume to differ from a critic of Mr. Saintsbury's wide reading and high authority without the greatest hesitation. But I must confess that the definition he suggests seems to me to be far too wide. He says of it himself that it is wider than Matthew Arnold's, and it appears to cover the perfection of expression in every direction and kind, its essence being, in his own words, 'consummateness under the circumstances'. His fuller definition explains this to mean 'the perfection of expression in every direction and kind, the commonly called great and the commonly called small, the tragic and the comic, the serious,

[1] This Essay first appeared in 'Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association', 1911.

the ironic, and even to some extent the trivial (not in the worst sense, of course). Whenever this perfection of expression acquires such force that it transmutes the subject and transports the hearer or reader, then and there the Grand Style exists, for so long and in such a degree as the transmutation of the one and the transportation of the other lasts'. I venture to urge that this is an undesirable and indeed impossible extension of the meaning of the term Grand Style. How can the great, or grand, style include the small, the comic and the trivial? Everything which Dickens puts into the mouth of Mrs. Gamp is 'consummate under the circumstances': it 'transmutes the subject and transports the reader'. So does most of what Stevenson put into the mouth of Michael Finsbury in *The Wrong Box*. Lear is not more perfect than Mr. Bennet: the words he utters do not more exactly fit the thing. But does any one, does Mr. Saintsbury himself, seriously ascribe the Grand Style to Mr. Bennet, or to Michael Finsbury, or to Mrs. Gamp? The examples which he gives appear to suggest that he has not after all the courage of his definition. For he never quotes in illustration of his more disputable assertions, as if he were vaguely conscious that quotation would not help them. Scarcely one of the passages with which he illustrates his essay is very widely removed from the order of poetry to which even the strictest critics would be willing to give the name of the Grand Style. His definition, then, scarcely seems to have been of much use even to himself. The object of the following pages is to attempt to arrive at something more definite and less all-embracing. It is not merely a question of excluding Mr. Saintsbury's comic and trivial and the rest. There is a finer dividing line than that, if I am not mistaken. After all, the Grand Style is precisely the Grand Style; which is evidently not the clever style, nor the brilliant style, nor even the imaginative, or the powerful, or the serious style. It may include some

of these things, but it is not identical with any. It is itself and nothing else. But what is it? What is grandeur or greatness of style?

Even Matthew Arnold, whose lectures on translating Homer are the *locus classicus* on this subject, seems to me to use the phrase 'Grand Style' in a wider sense than is desirable. For instance, when he appears to say that Homer is always in the Grand Style; and when he replies to critics who point to the innumerable passages such as

> ὤτρυνεν δὲ ἕκαστον ἐποιχόμενος ἐπέεσσιν,
> Μέσθλην τε, Γλαῦκόν τε, Μέδοντά τε, Θερσίλοχόν τε,

that 'these lines are very good poetry indeed, poetry of the best class, *in that place*', the answer, though good enough against those who deny the poetic quality of the lines, does not meet those who deny them the peculiar quality of the Grand Style. That quality they can hardly be said to possess in themselves, as he quotes them, but only, if at all, by association with greater things. This, however, may be a mere passing lapse, as his language elsewhere points to a stricter definition. But, however that may be, it seems plain that the first thing needful in this quest of the Grand Style, if we are to make it mean anything definite, is to realize that poetry can be extremely fine, can be perfect in its kind, without being in the Grand Style. Arnold's own definition of it brings this out. 'The Grand Style', he says, 'arises in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or with severity a serious subject.' This is clearly a much more useful definition than Mr. Saintsbury's. It draws us in much closer to the object. It does not pretend to make the Grand Style co-extensive with every kind of good writing. Indeed, it clearly does not cover all the ground covered by fine poetry. For, according to Arnold, if a poem is to be in the Grand Style, the subject of it must be serious, the treatment simple or severe, the poet a man of noble nature. The first condition excludes *The Rape of the Lock*, the second Keats's *Ode to*

the Nightingale, the third *Don Juan*. Yet all these are admirable poems, among the very finest in the English language. But the fact that it is a poetic jewel five cantos long will not give *The Rape of the Lock* a serious subject; the fact that Keats's *Nightingale* is the very breath and finer spirit of romance will not make its treatment either simple or severe; the fact that *Don Juan* is an unsurpassed and irresistible torrent of poetic power will not make it the work of a man of noble nature, will not prevent it from being the work of the less noble side of a man whose nobleness was a thing of occasional flashes and not of abiding presence. Thus there are great exclusions even on the basis of Arnold's definition. But it is possible that even this definition might gain by a little tightening. The nature of the poet, for instance, may be left out; it concerns us only so far as it affects the poetry and is to be judged by the poetry. An ignoble man often has noble moments and may rise to the Grand Style in them. We know next to nothing of Sappho or Pindar, and not much of Shakespeare; their poetry, or part of it, remains, and it is on its own qualities that it must be accorded or denied the supreme merit of the Grand Style. Then, again, another point that might perhaps be improved in the definition is the word 'serious', which has in English a too exclusively moral connotation. Arnold means σπουδαῖος, which he elsewhere renders 'nobly serious'. Perhaps 'great' is nearer as well as simpler. Then it may be well to qualify the 'simplicity' of the definition. Wordsworth was assuredly a noble nature, poetically gifted, and the subject of *We are Seven* is a serious one treated with simplicity, yet no one would say the poem was in the Grand Style. That is obviously because its simplicity is not the simplicity of the Grand Style. May we then provisionally revise Arnold's definition, and make it read something like this: 'The Grand Style arises in poetry when a great subject is treated by the action of the imagination with severity or with a noble

simplicity ' ? I have added the words ' by the action of the imagination ' as a substitute for Arnold's ' poetically gifted ' applied to the author ; the point being in either case that the simplicity or severity must be of a poetic order, that is, must produce an effect on the imagination.

But definitions are by themselves abstract things, and in these delicate matters of perception abstractions convey little unless illustrated by concrete instances. Where shall we go for passages of good poetry that are, and others that are not, in the Grand Style ? There are a very few poets whose entire, or almost entire, work is in that style. Milton is the obvious and universally accepted instance ; Dante is almost certainly another ; some of us might take courage to add Pindar for a third, in spite of the opinion of the great critic whom we used to call Longinus, who speaks of Pindar as a great poet whose genius often suffers lamentable eclipse. But, however that may be, it is certain that no poet in the whole history of literature better illustrates the compelling power of style. His subjects are not by themselves great subjects ; they are the mere victories of aristocratic athletes or chariot-owners ; but, and this is the important point, he seldom fails so to treat them that they become great, by bringing them into relation with things of inherent poetic greatness, the august beginnings of an ancient and noble house, the connexion of the human and the divine, the eternal majesty of law and right. By the greatness of his nature and the power of his style he carries the minds of his readers far away above his patron's personal achievements, fulfilling and exalting their imagination with the vision of high things of everlasting truth and import. He is a difficult poet ; but happily for those who are not perfect Grecians it is the same with him as with Dante and Shakespeare ; his very finest passages are often among those that are the easiest to read. Take, for instance, the noble ode which concludes the *Olympians*. It is quite short and

easy, and its proper subject is merely a boy's victory in a race. Yet what an astonishing achievement it is, the Grand Style at its highest height !

Καφισίων ὑδάτων λαχοῖσαν αἵτε
ναίετε καλλίπωλον ἕδραν,
ὦ λιπαρᾶς ἀοίδιμοι βασίλειαι
Χάριτες Ὀρχομενοῦ, παλαιγόνων Μινυᾶν ἐπίσκοποι,
κλῦτ', ἐπεὶ εὔχομαι. σὺν ὑμῖν γὰρ τά τε τερπνὰ καὶ
τὰ γλυκέα γίγνεται πάντα βροτοῖς,
εἰ σοφός, εἰ καλός, εἴ τις ἀγλαὸς ἀνήρ. οὔτε γὰρ θεοὶ
τὶ σεμνᾶν Χαρίτων ἄτερ
κοιρανέοντι χοροὺς οὔτε δαῖτας· ἀλλὰ πάντων ταμίαι
ἔργων ἐν οὐρανῷ, χρυσότοξον θέμεναι παρὰ
Πύθιον Ἀπόλλωνα θρόνους,
ἀέναον σέβοντι πατρὸς Ὀλυμπίοιο τιμάν.

ὦ πότνι' Ἀγλαΐα φιλησίμολπέ τ'
Εὐφροσύνα, θεῶν κρατίστου
παῖδες, ἐπάκοος γένευ, Θαλία τε
ἐρασίμολπε, ἰδοῖσα τόνδε κῶμον ἐπ' εὐμενεῖ τύχᾳ
κοῦφα βιβῶντα· Λυδίῳ δ' Ἀσώπιχον ἐν τρόπῳ
μελέταις ἔν τ' ἀείδων ἔμολον,
οὕνεκ' Ὀλυμπιόνικος ἁ Μιννεία σεῦ ἕκατι.
μελαντειχέα νῦν δόμον
Φερσεφόνας ἴθι, Ἀχοῖ, πατρὶ κλυτὰν φεροῖσ' ἀγγελίαν,
Κλεύδαμον ὄφρ' ἰδοῖσ' υἱὸν εἴπῃς, ὅτι οἱ νέαν
κόλποις παρ' εὐδόξου Πίσας
ἐστεφάνωσε κυδίμων ἀέθλων πτεροῖσι χαίταν.

It is impossible to translate poetry ; above all, poetry like this. But even in the far-off shadow of such a prose rendering as this which I have attempted, some fragment of its peculiar majesty of beauty may shine through :

O ye who dwell in that home of fair steeds that has the waters of Cephisus for its portion, ye Graces, famed queens of the rich earth of Orchomenus, guardians of the ancient Minyans, hear my prayer, for I call. Where you come come all things sweet and joyous to men ; be a man wise, or fair, or nobly-famed, your gift it is. For apart from the holy Graces not even the gods set up any dance or feast ; but of all doings in Heaven the Graces have the ordering, and, seated on thrones next to Pythian Apollo of the golden bow, they do their reverence to the eternal glory of the father of Olympus.

O gracious Aglaia, and Euphrosyne that lovest song, daughters of the most high of the gods, hear me; and thou, Thalia, that delightest in music, look upon this choir of ours as it dances lightly along in all the joy of victory. I come to lift high with all my art in these Lydian strains the name of Asopicus because through him the Minyan city has by thy grace achieved Olympian victory. Go now, Echo, to the dark-walled house of Persephone, and bear the tale of glory to his father; stand before Cleudamos and tell him that in the hollow lands of famous Pisa his son has crowned his young locks with the winged chaplet of Olympia's glorious games.

Unless the deficiencies of the translation are even greater than I fear, every reader who has a sense of what is meant by style will be ready to understand me when I ask, Can the force of poetic style go farther than this? And it is not merely style in general, if there be such a thing, but it is the particular kind of style we are in search after. This, if anything, is surely the Grand Style. Here is certainly the great subject made great by the greatness of the poet's mind. His ostensible subject is indeed the victory of Asopicus in a race at Olympia; and that is all the average man would have seen in it. But what does Pindar see? First he escapes from the individual point of view to the national or civic; the boy belongs to Orchomenus, and his success is the success of his city. But that city is under the special protection of the Graces who had a shrine there; and the thought of that carries us away up to the Graces, to all they are and mean in human life, and, more than that, in the life of the gods too. And so we have travelled from the individual to the state, from the human to the divine, from earth to heaven; and a poem that might have been a mere outburst of athleticism has become a song of thanksgiving and an act of prayer. By the last line of the first stanza we have reached the eternity of heaven. But the song is in the Lydian mode, says the poet, and, if Boeckh be right, that implies that it has in it the supplicant's cry. And so another eternity comes into the poet's mind; the eternity of the dead. And the last

word is of yet another immortal thing, the undying love of father and son. All that greatness has been put into the story of a boy's running. That is how the mind and imagination that produce the great style work, on the side of subject. From the smallest thing there is a true and natural stepping-stone to the greatest things, and such a mind is sure to find it, is sure to know how to see the humblest matter *sub specie aeterni*, as part of a divine and everlasting order.

But the Grand Style is not an affair merely of high imaginative conception of a subject ; it is also an affair of treatment in detail, above all of language. When Cowley wishes to compliment Charles I on his return from Scotland he writes :

> Welcome, great Sir ; with all the joy that 's due
> To the return of peace and you ;
> Two greatest blessings which this age can know !
> For that to thee, for thee to Heaven we owe.
> Others by war their conquests gain,
> You like a god your ends obtain ;
> Who, when rude Chaos for his help did call,
> Spoke but the word, and sweetly ordered all.

Why is this plainly not in the Grand Style ? After all, it escapes well, as Pindar's ode does, from the temporary and accidental side of the subject. Peace and the Heaven to which we owe it are great themes, with the immortal quality in each of them ; and the victory of order over chaos is the thing with which this world began, with the consummation of which the world as we know it will end. Why, then, does Cowley fall so far below the Grand Style ? Well, according to our definition, that style arises through 'the action of the imagination' ; is there much imagination here ? Is the poet, that is, ever for a moment caught up out of the everyday facts of life, out of prose, out of himself ? Pindar may not have believed in the actual existence of any such divinity as Echo ; Keats certainly did not believe in the goddess Maia ; but each is in his poem for the moment lifted

up out of himself, is become no longer a mere individual, but a part of the universal human imagination to which Echo and Maia are true living visions. ' Everything invented so as to fill mind and heart and soul ', says a good writer, ' is true.' Pindar's invention stands this test. But who does not feel that this is not so with Cowley's lines ? There it is the intellect which is at work, not the imagination ; cleverness, not the sense of the wonder and joy of the world. And it speaks, as cleverness is wont to speak, making points, unmoved and unmoving, in the language of the Court, the Senate, or the street, not in the language of poetry. Poetry is a thing impassioned and musical ; this is a thing coldly and harshly self-possessed, never transported into the mood which calls for something beyond common speech, for a language and a rhythm expressing the exaltation of imaginative emotion. The difference between ὦ πότνι' Ἀγλαΐα and ' Welcome, great Sir ' is not the difference between Greek and English ; it is the difference between the Grand Style and the language of the Lord Mayor. We have seen what Cowley does. What does Pindar do ? Hear him again :

σὺν ὑμῖν γὰρ τά τε τερπνὰ καὶ
τὰ γλυκέα γίγνεται πάντα βροτοῖς.

The Lord Mayor cannot talk like that, does not wish to in all likelihood. Is there anywhere a more perfect example of the noble simplicity which belongs to the Grand Style ? And as to the other quality, severity—for the poem has both—where can we find it better than in

οὔτε γὰρ θεοὶ
τὶ σεμνᾶν Χαρίτων ἄτερ
κοιρανέοντι χορούς.

The essence of severity is self-restraint ; the quality which, for instance, is conspicuously absent from the early poems of Keats—which, delightful as they are in many ways, are totally unrestrained, running along in a self-abandonment,

sometimes of babbling garrulity, sometimes of luscious self-indulgence.

> A tuft of evening primroses,
> O'er which the wind may hover till it dozes ;
> O'er which it well might take a pleasant sleep,
> But that 'tis ever startled by the leap
> Of buds into ripe flowers.

This is genuine poetry, inspired by an emotion which Keats may almost be said to have rediscovered for England, that of the sensuous deliciousness of nature's doings ; but there is plainly no self-restraint, no severity in it, and its simplicity is rather childish and easy-going than noble. Or take some finer lines in the same poem :

> Open afresh your round of starry folds,
> Ye ardent marigolds !
> Dry up the moisture from your golden lids,
> For great Apollo bids
> That in these days your praises should be sung
> On many harps, which he has lately strung :
> And when again your dewiness he kisses
> Tell him, I have you in my world of blisses.
> So haply when I rove in some far vale
> His mighty voice may come upon the gale.

This evidently strikes a higher note. It is fine poetry ; but is it, in spite of the last two lines, quite in the Grand Style ? Hardly, I think ; the passage as a whole has in it a good deal more sugar and prettiness than the refining fires of the Grand Style will admit. Keats will have to wait one or two more of his scanty years before he can reach that high manner, his own ' large utterance of the early gods '. He will have to wait for the inspired moments of *Hyperion*, for the *Ode to Autumn*, or rather, not so long as that, for the *Ode to Maia*, which, though only a fragment, is all of pure gold, the gold of the Grand Style unalloyed :

> Mother of Hermes ! and still youthful Maia !
> May I sing to thee
> As thou wast hymned on the shores of Baiae
> Or may I woo thee

In earlier Sicilian ? Or thy smiles
Seek as they once were sought, in Grecian isles
By bards who died content on pleasant sward,
Leaving great verse unto a little clan ?
O, give me their old vigour, and unheard
Save of the quiet primrose, and the span
Of heaven, and few ears,
Rounded by thee, my song should die away
Content as theirs,
Rich in the simple worship of a day.

Matthew Arnold has a sonnet on the Austerity of Poetry. Well, not all poetry either is or ought to be austere, but this peculiar kind of poetry which we are discussing can hardly do without some touch of austerity. The beauty of a garden of roses is one thing, the beauty of a mountain line is another. It is this latter kind of beauty which the Grand Style asks, and how admirably Keats has attained it in that noble fragment ! How grave it is, how quiet, how unexpansive, what a wise economy of emotion and ornament, even of language itself, it practises ! Many true lovers of poetry, perhaps the majority, will prefer the magnificent Nightingale Ode, with its torrential flow of unrestrained fancy, eloquence, and emotion. Possibly they may be right, but that does not seem to me to alter the fact that the one poem is, and the other on the whole is not, in the Grand Style.

And there are other things beside eloquence and emotion to which the Grand Style applies its economy. The large and simple effects at which it aims are destroyed at once by any too visible activity of the intellect. Browning, for instance, is a great poet, who, after being for a short time over-valued, seems now again to be unduly depreciated. But he is excluded from the company of the masters of the Grand Style by the restless, almost fussy, habit of his mind as much as by his lack of ear for the beauty of words. He cannot be still ; and therefore, ingenious and subtle as he is, picturesque, tender, moving, occasionally profound, he is scarcely ever great as Dante and Milton are great. The difference between

Bishop Blougram and the *Divina Commedia* is that between the truth arrived at by a series of parliamentary debates and the truth that exists self-poised and self-assured in the mind of an artist or a saint. Dante and Milton have the air of men who have been through a great experience which has left its indelible mark upon them. For them henceforth the issues of life are tremendous things, and they look with grave wonder at the childishness of men. Their language is greatness speaking ; and, full as they are of the awe of greatness, they yet know well that greatness speaking is for those who have ears to hear the true music, as greatness appearing is for those who have eyes to see the true beauty. Browning had glimpses of all this, but he had too little restfulness in him, his mind was too kaleidoscopic, to allow of his reaching the grand manner. His note is rather that of a man who had been through many experiences, great and small, all of which he was willing to toss backwards and forwards in conversational battle after dinner. The joy of battle is a fine thing, and he loved it in fine fashion, but it is perhaps a thing with too much hurry and excitement in it to produce easily the particular thing we are looking for. That belongs rather to the calm than to the storm, though perhaps no calm will give it but that which the storm has preceded. Take a stanza from the Epilogue to *Asolando* :

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

That has all sorts of inspiring merits, but the Grand Style I do not hear in it. It is too eager, too restless, too unmusical, its discords as yet too unresolved, for that. For the exact thing we mean we must go on to a stanza from a parallel poem by a greater poet :

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
Turns again home ;—

or to another last word in which a poet greater still was almost certainly thinking, like Browning and Tennyson, of his own life and its approaching close :

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast ; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise, or blame ; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

The storm has done its work and is passed, leaving this great peace behind it :

All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face
But unexpectedly returns,
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously ; whence Gaza mourns,
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent :
His servants he with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event
With peace and consolation hath dismissed,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

Milton has greater things than this elsewhere, but he has nothing that illustrates better the power of the great style. It is stern and bare like the great mountains ; and as strangely, as inexplicably, moving. The wide-ranging intellect has received its final answer and will go on no more journeys ; the storm-tossed and much-suffering soul is at last at rest.

Of course no poet can long maintain the Grand Style quite at such a level of severity as this, or would escape monotony if he did. What is meant by saying that a poem is in the Grand Style throughout is that no considerable proportion of it is out of key with that style. That is obviously true of the

Paradise Lost; it is also true of the *Divine Comedy*, and perhaps, though I think with less certainty, of the *Iliad*. The greatest things in the *Iliad*, Priam and Achilles, Helen and Priam, Hector and Andromache, are altogether out of Milton's reach, and probably out of Dante's too; but neither Milton nor Dante would have been content to leave so many deserts of confused and rather meaningless fighting, all details and incidents, with little or none of that sense of the big issues behind them which the Grand Style will not dispense with, and which scarcely for a moment fails Dante or Milton.

But let us come to a name still greater, perhaps, even than any of these. Is it to be said that Shakespeare is always, or even almost always, in the Grand Style? Take some of the characters in which his creative genius is seen in splendid activity and his power over words, over expression, over style, is exhibited to the full; take the Bastard, take Iago, take Falstaff. Is it the Grand Style that they talk? Surely not, if words are to retain any meaning. And why not? Because—with the exception of a moment now and then—the talk of these characters does not deal with great subjects, or, if it does, the manner of its doing so has neither the severity nor the noble simplicity of the Grand Style. Their thoughts have in them nothing of that sense of the bigness of things of which I spoke just now, and their words none of the solemn music which comes from those who have that sense and the power to give utterance to it.

But it is possible to go further. Take characters of a different sort to whom Shakespeare intended to give, and indeed gave, high qualities and high utterance. To such characters on serious occasions Homer, Dante, and Milton always give the Grand Style. But does Shakepeare? I think not; by no means always, that is. He gives Constance such lines as only he can give:

> There was not such a gracious creature born.

But he seems to be equally willing to give her such rhetorical crudities as

> Thou odoriferous stench, sound rottenness.

He makes the scene between Hubert and Arthur a wonder of pathos and beauty ; but he crowds it with fanciful conceits that have on them the stamp of Elizabethanism, not that of the Grand Style ; it is but a few lines that separate such a thing as

> Nay, hear me, Hubert, drive these men away,
> And I will sit as quiet as a lamb.

from

> The iron of itself, though heat red-hot,
> Approaching near these eyes would drink my tears
> And quench his fiery indignation.

So in *Troilus and Cressida* it is the same Ulysses who says :

> Take but degree away, untune that string,
> And, hark, what discord follows ! each thing meets
> In mere oppugnancy ; the bounded waters
> Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores.
> And make a sop of all this solid globe ;
> Strength should be lord of imbecility,
> And the rude son should strike his father dead ;—

and who also says :

> That were to enlard his fat-already pride,
> And add more coals to Cancer when he burns
> With entertaining great Hyperion.

Or let us be bold enough to lay hands on a still more famous thing and take a finer distinction. The last speech of Romeo is the glorious crown of the play which is the very essence and undying flower of all romance ; yet even there, if we are quite honest with ourselves, is it not true that after

> O, here
> Will I set up my everlasting rest,
> And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
> From this world-wearied flesh ;—

we have a feeling that the legal metaphor about sealing

a dateless bargain to engrossing death is not the kind of metaphor a master whose sense of style never failed him would have chosen ? Shakespeare can indeed so dazzle and enchant and overwhelm us that he can do without these artist virtues. But the truth remains, if we keep on this side idolatry, that a perfect artist Shakespeare is not. He is both more and less than that. He is a force, a genius, an energy of creation, with his mind set on high things, which made him careless about blemishes of style or phrase ; he is also less than an artist in that he was, as far as we can judge, much a man of business, prepared to give his public what it liked and would pay for, and not always careful to give more. Bettering what will serve the immediate purpose is for people who are wholly artists, like Virgil ; not for people who are partly purveyors of dramatic wares, like Shakespeare. But to return to our more immediate subject. If one is to have the courage to be perfectly frank, I, for my part, should confess that I doubt whether the temperament of Shakespeare was that which makes for the use of the Grand Style, which, as we define it, is a style involving either severity of language or a noble simplicity. What could be more difficult to a nature of such measureless abundance as Shakespeare's ? For such a man to study to be quiet, to keep that mighty stream of thought and knowledge within its banks, to rein in the fiery coursers of that soaring imagination, was a task a thousand times more difficult than smaller poets can ever know. It came easier to him to say a thing again and again in a hundred brilliant ways than it comes to other men to get it once well said at all ; and every play is proof of how often he was unable to resist the glorious temptation. Yet he could resist it, consciously, or, perhaps, unconsciously, by some divine inspiration ; and all the great plays are full of lines in which a universe of thought or feeling is packed into a phrase, to stand for ever in its single simplicity or severity, the pure and unwatered wine of the Grand Style.

They come upon us wherever we open the book. There is Othello's

> When I love thee not
> Chaos is come again—

or his

> Ah, balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
> Justice to break her sword !

or the

> There is a world elsewhere

of Coriolanus : or Macbeth's

> She should have died hereafter—

or the call to Cleopatra :

> The bright day is done,
> And we are for the dark—

or her answer :

> Dost thou not see the baby at my breast
> That sucks the nurse asleep ?

or Lear's

> You do me wrong to take me out of the grave ;

or Hamlet's

> The rest is silence.

They are everywhere ; one quotes them for the delight of it, not for argument. But it still remains true that such tense and concentrated force as this is not the ordinary manner of Shakespeare. His myriad-minded energy has a thousand manners, of course ; but if I am not mistaken this note of self-contained intensity, this forceful compression of large matter into a little room, is not one of the commonest. Take the poems. Mr. Saintsbury considers them all, and particularly the Sonnets, to be pure Grand Style throughout : a judgement which, with all respect, I can only find amazing. Is it really necessary to ask whether *Venus and Adonis*, that ' trifling foolish banquet ' of poetry, is to be held to

be in the Grand Style? A single stanza is surely answer enough:

> Still she entreats, and prettily entreats,
> For to a pretty ear she tunes her tale;
> Still is he sullen, still he lours and frets,
> 'Twixt crimson shame, and anger ashy-pale;
> Being red, she loves him best; and being white,
> Her best is better'd with a more delight.

It is not a question of pleasing more or less; it is a question of classification. Can dainty verse of this sort be by any violence brought into the same category with

> Or if Sion hill
> Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd
> Fast by the oracle of God;

or

> So pass'd they naked on, nor shunn'd the sight
> Of God or Angel;

or, to keep to Shakespeare himself,

> If it be so,
> It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
> That ever I have felt?

The question answers itself.

But to come to the Sonnets where Shakespeare speaks in his own person, and is often in the mood that makes the Grand Style. Can the hundred and fifty sonnets be said to be in that style as a whole, in the sense that the *Iliad* and the Greek tragedians and the *Odes* of Pindar and the *Divine Comedy* and the *Paradise Lost* as wholes are? Are they not, as a whole, far too self-abandoned, both in luxury of fancy and passion and in the play of intellectual activity, to permit anything more than momentary appearances of the stillness of the Grand Style? Still, no doubt they have in them great things in the great style:

> Nay, if you read this line, remember not
> The hand that writ it—

and

this huge stage presenteth nought but shows,
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment—

and

Take all my loves, my Love, yea, take them all—

and

Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end—

and

And brass eternal slave to mortal rage—

and a hundred more. But that is scarcely the prevailing note. The distinctions in these matters are delicate and difficult, but perhaps even in lines such as these there is just the suggestion of an approach to ' preciousness '—a thing very alien to the Grand Style. Is it not felt when they are placed by the side of the purest Grand Style ? Let us hear it again, this time from a poet who exhibits the extreme both of its presence and of its absence :

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I had no human fears—

or

And while in that vast solitude to which
The tide of things has borne him.

There are finer things than these in Shakespeare's sonnets very likely, but few or none, it seems to me, that ring so exactly and absolutely true to the note we are looking for, and the shadow of a shade which hints at a separation between ' No longer mourn for me when I am dead ', and the pure Grand Style makes itself felt much more plainly in the majority of the Sonnets. While the Grand Style is comparatively rare, it seems to me, what may perhaps be called the ' lovely ' style is very common :

And beauty making beautiful old rhyme
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights—

Look what is best, that best I wish in thee ;
This wish I have ; then ten times happy me !—

Sweet roses do not so :
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made—

To entertain the time with thoughts of love
Which time and thoughts so sweetly doth deceive.

It is almost profanity to say a word of anything but delight in such lovely verses. Only, would the verse of Simonides or Pindar have enjoyed its own exquisiteness so openly as this ? Do they display their charms quite so freely ? Are their emotions so full of words ? Or take the most passionate poet of antiquity :

δέδυκε μὲν ἀ σελάνα
καὶ Πληΐαδες, μέσαι δὲ
νύκτες, πάρα δ' ἔρχετ' ὤρα,
ἐγὼ δὲ μόνα κατεύδω.

The moon is set and the Pleiades ; the night is half through her course ; the time is going by ; and I lie alone in my bed.

It is plainly a different style, which one may like more or less than the other, but in either case one is entitled to distinguish.

This manner of rich loveliness, as I should call it, seems to me the most frequent manner of the Sonnets, but there are many others too ; the *dainty* manner, the manner of affected prettiness :

I tell the day, to please him thou art bright,
And dost him grace when clouds do blot the heaven :

the *ingenious* manner, as of a verbal or intellectual puzzle :

Now see what good turns eyes for eyes have done :
Mine eyes have drawn thy shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast, where-through the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze therein on thee ;

or

If I lose thee, my loss is my love's gain,
And losing her, my friend hath found that loss ;
Both find each other, and I lose both twain,
And both for my sake lay on me this cross ;

the *conceited* manner, the darling and besetting sin of that day, where the situation is violently forced into the mould of some far-fetched and incongruous image :

> To 'cide this title is impannelèd
> A quest of thoughts, all tenants to the heart,
> And by their verdict is determinèd
> The clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part ;

or again, the literary *antithetic* style, which was to have such a crowded future and to descend so far from this height of poetry and sincerity :

> And gilded honour shamefully misplaced,
> And maiden virtue rudely strumpeted,
> And right perfection wrongfully disgraced,
> And strength by limping sway disabled ;

or, to take but one more, that manner which seems to give the very soul of the Romantic movement two hundred years before its time, not the literary, external, merely human romance of Elizabethanism, but the inward, spiritual, universal romance of Wordsworth and Keats and Hugo :

> Not mine own fears, nor the prophetic soul
> Of the wide world dreaming on things to come.

All these manners are in this wonderful series of poems ; what is certainly not there, as I venture to think, is any general or pervading unity of the Grand Style.

One might extend such illustrations indefinitely without going outside our own poets. Do we find the Grand Style in Chaucer ? Seldom or never, I think. The ambling ease, the wandering garrulity, of that most companionable of men is a thing not very compatible with grandeur. Do we find it in Spenser ? Perhaps we do ;

> Open the temple gates unto my love,
> Open them wide that she may enter in,
> And all the postes adorne as doth behove,
> And all the pillours deck with girlands trim,
> For to receive this Saynt with honour due
> That cometh in to you.

But the long-drawn melodies of Spenser's rich music, his luxuriance of fancy, his exuberance of eloquence and learning and curiosity of speech, do not often allow of this fiery directness of style. And even here the treatment is much more expansive than the strict masters of the Grand Style would allow themselves. The difference is of course far more conspicuous in the commoner mood of Spenser :

> Long were to tell the travell and long toile
> Through which this shield of love I late have wonne,
> And purchasèd this peerless beauties spoile,
> That harder may be ended then begonne.
> But since ye so desire your will be done.
> Then hearke, ye gentle knights and ladies free,
> My hard mishaps that ye may learn to shonne ;
> For though sweet love to conquer glorious be
> Yet is the pain thereof much greater than the fee.

Perhaps there is more of it in the poet whom Spenser called his master, in Sidney ; for though the pupil went far beyond the master, it is Sidney and not Spenser who is the discoverer of the English language as we have known it in English poetry ever since. And that perfect simplicity and purity of language is one of the things most demanded by the Grand Style. But they are not enough by themselves, as the delightful song-writers of the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline periods are enough to show. These poets are too slight, too occasional, too personal, they have too narrow an outlook, to give the large impression of which we are in search. Herrick came nearest to it, perhaps, but even he can only approach it and fall away :

> If after rude and boisterous seas
> My wearied pinnace here finds ease ;
> If so it be I've gained the shore
> With safety of a faithful oar ;
> If having run my barque on ground
> Ye see the aged vessel crown'd ;
> What 's to be done ? but on the sands
> Ye dance and sing and now clap hands.
> —The first act 's doubtful, but (we say)
> It is the last commends the Play.

The rich sound and large suggestion of the first couplet might have been a fit prelude to the true Grand Style, but is the simplicity of ' What 's to be done ' in this context a noble simplicity ? And, if it were, could anything redeem the ninth line with its hideous succession of ' first ', ' act ', ' doubt ', ' but ', and its final tag ' we say ' stuck in to save the rhyme ? No, whatever this is, it is not the Grand Style. Nor is that style often discoverable in the great Dryden, whose greatness is rather of the mind than the imagination, while his simplicity begins to be rather that of prose than that of poetry. I am one of those who, in spite of Swinburne, think that Gray is a greater poet than Collins, but nothing in Gray seems to me to attain so perfectly to the Grand Style as the opening of Collins's famous Ode.

> If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
> May hope, chaste eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
> Like thy own solemn springs
> Thy springs, and dying gales
>
> O nymph reserved—

has, to my ear, a sterner and grander simplicity than

> The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day.

Still, one would be sorry to deny that the note of the great *Elegy* and of the best parts of the Odes comes very near that of the Grand Style. No one in that day, certainly, would have understood what is meant by it so well as Gray. There is nothing of it in Pope ; and, when we get a little later on, there is nothing of it, I think, in Goldsmith, nothing in Crabbe, nothing in Cowper, except perhaps the *Loss of the Royal George*. Wordsworth exhibits, as I have said, the two extremes—its presence in sovereign perfection, its blank and irremediable absence. Scott is too local and physical, too lacking in universality and serious thought, to attain to it. Byron can achieve it, as he can achieve everything else, for a moment, but his fitfulness, and his rhetorical cast of mind,

prevent any considerable exhibition of a manner so grave and quiet. Shelley has it often in those golden moments when neither his cloudy love of the abstract and unconditional, nor the incoherent restlessness of his mind, deprives him of the necessary simplicity ; in such stanzas as :

> Out of the day and night
> A joy has taken flight ;
> Fresh Spring, and Summer, and Winter hoar,
> Move my faint heart with grief, but with delight
> No more—oh, never more !

or in such an astonishing single line, great even beyond the greatness of the poem in which it occurs, as :

> O Wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind ?

Of Keats we have already spoken ; and after those days we get very near our own, and these always delicate distinctions do not grow easier. But Landor, though as certainly not one of our great poets as he assuredly is one of our very greatest masters of prose, touched these heights of style, it seems to me, not only in a thousand places of his prose, not only in that most perfect of all epitaphs :

> Literarum quaesivit gloriam : videt dei ;

but also once or twice in his verse—

> Death stands above me, whispering low
> I know not what into my ear :
> Of his strange language all I know
> Is, there is not a word of fear.

Tennyson has abundance of it when his conscious search after the verbal felicities in which he has no modern equal allows him enough simplicity. One supreme instance is enough, another epitaph, the finest that exists in English verse, as Landor's is perhaps the finest in Latin prose :

> Not here ! the white North has thy bones ; and thou,
> Heroic sailor-soul,
> Art passing on thine happier voyage now
> Toward no earthly pole.

I will mention only one other poet. Swinburne's exuberant verbosity is not easily compatible with grandeur, and produces the curious result that the poet is perhaps more apt to attain the Grand Style in translation than in his own original poetry. Is his style ever more nobly simple than in

> Take heed of this small child of earth;
> He is great; he hath in him God most high?—

or again in

> Men, brother men, that after us yet live,
> Let not your hearts too hard against us be.

Still, no doubt such a gift of style as his could not be confined to the translations. Whole poems full of it are to be found in every volume Swinburne issued:

> Seeing death has no part in him any more, no power
> Upon his head;
> He has bought his eternity with a little hour,
> And is not dead.

And brief fires of it shine for a moment in a thousand poems, too soon extinguished by rhetoric and repetition, by too many words and too little matter to fill them:

> For being in such poor eyes so beautiful,
> It must needs be, as God is more than I,
> So much more love He hath of you than mine.

or

> Me these allure, and know me; but no man
> Knows, and my goddess only. Lo now, see
> If one of all you these things vex at all.

But it is time to leave individual poets and sum up the general position. What I have been trying to argue is that the Grand Style is not just any style that makes good poetry, but a particular kind of style. It is the style which takes its spirit from the poet's overpowering consciousness of the presence of greatnes . 'Therefore let thy words be few' is the secretly, perhaps unconsciously, heard message which it obeys in its supreme manifestations. In

them it is a thing rather of fine line than of rich colour ; sculpture rather than painting ; with nothing voluptuous, or even overflowing, in it ; quiet, austere, with a kind of stern simplicity. At its highest it is brief and pregnant, suggesting more than it says, not filling or satisfying the mind, but quickening the imagination. Its austerity is that of art, not of morals ; the austerity of the conditioned, of that which knows that the half is greater than the whole. And yet nothing individual or particular will satisfy it. The all is in it as well as the one : while it will not lose itself in the illimitable, it does its own limited work in the conscious presence of the infinite. It knows that for poetry 'the present is', as Landor said, 'like a note in music, nothing but as it appertains to what is past and what is to come'. Those old words *sub specie aeterni*, to which we may add *sub specie universi*, are the law of all the greatest poetry, and especially of that which lays claim to the Grand Style, which indeed can hardly exist without them. If it be asked what there is of the eternal or universal in lines so plainly stamped with the Grand Style as

> Dost thou not see the baby at my breast
> That sucks the nurse asleep ?

or

> E solo in parte vidi il Saladino

the answer is that certainly in the first, and I think also in the second, the reader is made to think of something far wider than the individual Cleopatra or Saladin. In that loneliness of greatness, in that tragic ruin of passion, we see no mere single person, but the secret genius of the whole world ; and we experience, what has been said of tragedy and might be said of all great art, that when we escape from the individual case, which might by itself be painful, to the sublime thought of universal humanity, everything else disappears in an ecstasy of awe before the vastness of the whole.

One word should be added, perhaps, on a point on which

misunderstanding might be possible. I have spoken mainly of those brief and supreme moments of greatness, and it is they which show what the Grand Style is when it is most of all itself. From them, from their spirit, its more ordinary manifestations are to be judged. The poetic heights are often visible when the poetically short-sighted cannot see them ; and visible, if only in distance and only to those who have fit eyes, they will, I think, generally be found to be wherever the Grand Style is really present. In any case the characteristics of this style, like any other, are most easily judged from passages in which they are present to an exceptional degree. If we are asked what the romantic manner is, we do not take just any passage from any poem by a romantic poet, but such a thing as Keats's :

> the same that oft-times hath
> Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

It is the same with the Grand Style, and for that reason I have dealt mainly with these supreme passages. But lest there be any misunderstanding, it may be well to say that I am very far from arguing that that style is confined to such passages, or is to be regarded as a thing of isolated lines or phrases, lightning flashes of sublimity. It not only pervades every word of short poems like the two odes of Pindar and Keats which I quoted in full, but makes itself felt as an abiding presence in whole epics like the *Iliad* or the *Aeneid*. It is present not only when the old men are paying to the beauty of Helen the most tremendous tribute beauty has ever won :

> *οὐ νέμεσις Τρῶας καὶ ἐϋκνήμιδας Ἀχαιοὺς*
> *τοιῇδ' ἀμφὶ γυναικὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἄλγεα πάσχειν—*

Truly it is nothing to move wrath that for such a woman as this Trojans and well-greaved Achaeans should suffer long years of woe ;

but also when, a hundred and fifty lines later, the poet has so

simple a thing to relate as the return of Priam from the battlefield :

> Ἦ ῥα, καὶ ἐς δίφρον ἄρνας θέτο ἰσόθεος φώς·
> ἂν δ' ἄρ' ἔβαιν' αὐτός, κατὰ δ' ἡνία τείνεν ὀπίσσω·
> πὰρ δέ οἱ Ἀντήνωρ περικαλλέα βήσατο δίφρον·
> τὼ μὲν ἄρ' ἄψορροι προτὶ Ἴλιον ἀπονέοντο.

It is present, not only when Virgil exerts all his signal power of moving the human heart :

> Heu, miserande puer ! si qua fata aspera rumpas,
> tu Marcellus eris. manibus date lilia plenis ;
> purpureos spargam flores, animamque nepotis
> his saltem accumulem donis, et fungar inani
> munere ;

but also when he has returned to the quiet telling of his story :

> Rex arva Latinus et urbes
> iam senior longa placidas in pace regebat.

So too it is not only present when Milton puts on all his multicoloured robes of splendour :

> Now glow'd the firmament
> With living sapphires. Hesperus, that led
> The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length
> Apparent queen, unveil'd her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw ;

but also when he is perhaps too tired for these magnificences and his epic draws sadly and quietly towards its end :

> As when he wash'd his servants' feet, so now,
> As father of his family, he clad
> Their nakedness with skins of beasts, or slain,
> Or as the snake with youthful coat repaid ;
> And thought not much to clothe his enemies.

Style like this bears its own hall-mark of greatness upon it. When one reads those four lines from the *Iliad*, one understands at once why Homer has been called the supreme master of the Grand Style simple. There is nothing quite like it in English ; the nearest thing to it is perhaps Wordsworth's simple narrative style :

whether it was care that spurred him
God only knows, but to the very last
He had the lightest foot in Ennerdale.

But Wordsworth is always sinking below simplicity; his simplicity cannot maintain itself through a thousand lines as that of the *Iliad* can, and besides there is in him generally an undercurrent of moral self-consciousness which is alien to the open-eyed frankness of Homer. Still, the simplicity of *Michael* and *Margaret* and *The Brothers* is certainly a noble simplicity, and, like the simplicity of the *Iliad*, if not in the same measure, entitles these poems to the immediate praise of the Grand Style. And one other thing should be noticed. It is not merely a question of manner. Those admirable Homeric lines have more in them even than a noble simplicity of manner. They have also what the great style needs, the element of greatness in them. Not in themselves, or by themselves, no doubt, but they were not written to stand by themselves. And, as it is, the simple fact which they relate is felt to be part of a great action, the action of the *Iliad*. So, in the great plays of Shakespeare, things which in themselves would have no grandeur of style, come upon us, not in themselves, but as parts of a great whole, and our minds, filled with that greatness as the poet knew they would be, confer an intensity of imagination on what by itself would seem commonplace, brighten what would seem low, touch with fire what would seem cold and lifeless. That is a perfectly legitimate action of the mind, whose very business is to look before and after and apprehend a whole. If the whole be great, the parts are parts of that which is great, and so these in themselves inferior passages of a great work form no break, unless they are very considerable, in the continuous impression of Grand Style which such works produce.

But greatness, whether immediate or derived, whether in the actual passage itself or in the whole of which it is a part,

it seems to me there must be. For greatness, the highest sort of greatness, is at the root of the Grand Style. Grandeur is indeed the visible form of the abstract idea of greatness, or perhaps greatness is the matter out of which art creates grandeur. At any rate, however we define it, the essential quality of the Grand Style is greatness, and the point which is attempted to be made here has been that greatness is not the same thing even as beauty or goodness ; still less is it the same thing as music of sound, or cleverness, or quickness of fancy, or verbal ingenuity, or any of the other things each of which may be the predominant quality of poetry which is generally and rightly admired. All these things are admirable, but they are not the particular thing of which we are in search. That is greatness, not the great soul alone, nor the great subject, but also greatness of art. Style is always a product of labour as well as of genius, and the great style is no exception to that rule. Even the magic simplicity of Burns or Catullus is the result of prolonged labour ; it is an art as well as an inspiration, just as Milton's elaborate rhythms are an inspiration as well as an art. His ease is that of a well-ordered procession or religious ceremony, or perhaps that which we should ascribe to the music of the spheres ; theirs is the ease of a beautiful childhood ; both of them things difficult for a grown man living on this earth to attain ; things reached, even by genius, only through an infinite taking of pains. But, in the great style, the art must never seem laboured, if by laboured we mean that which still struggles with difficulty and is not yet victorious. It is the essence of greatness of style to give an impression of not needing to use all its strength, as also of not choosing to utter all its thought. To take Dante's line again :

E solo in parte vidi il Saladino.

The poet says that and leaves it so ; he does not do any more to inform our minds or to arouse our imaginations. I know

no passage which illustrates more forcibly the method of the Grand Style in its greatest moments, and I know none more fit to be the last word of an attempt to study it. For it is, after all, the thing itself which explains itself ; no labour of defining words can give the secret of that which unites the cloudy majesty of Milton with the open sunlight of Homer, the magic strokes of Shakespeare with the consummate art of Pindar, the severe simplicity of Dante, clear-cut as a precious stone, unyielding and immutable, with that so different simplicity, clear too, but with the clearness of a stream in the sunshine, a thing infinitely mobile and winning and gracious, the liquid and human simplicity of Catullus. The study of the kinds of literary style is in part a study of affinities, and none can be more fascinating, or more difficult, than that of the unifying links, and especially that central one of overwhelming power combined with restraint and reserve in its use, which hold together poets so diverse as these in the common glory of the Grand Style. It is ground on which we all should be able to meet. For men, all men as Wordsworth thought, 'thirst for power and majesty'. Not always, no doubt, but at the moments when they feel themselves at their highest. And nothing in literature satisfies those supreme moments like the Grand Style, which is itself, in the famous phrase of Longinus, *μεγαλοφροσύνης ἀπήχημα*, the echo of a great soul.

SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORIES

Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died in 1616, on the 23rd April which was probably his birthday. We know comparatively little of his life. What we do know has been admirably put together and told by Sir Sidney Lee, who is inclined, however, to exaggerate what there is to tell. After all it does not come to very much. Indeed it comes to almost nothing compared with what we know of Milton. We have the dates of Shakespeare's birth, marriage, and death, we can name some houses he lived in, one of which survives, we possess some fragments of writing which include his signature, and some documents or entries which speak of him. But they all deal with the external man, and rather with his affairs than with himself. One would gladly give them all for a single letter to wife or child, or even a single plain-speaking personal utterance in prose or verse of the sort that abounds in the case of Milton. We know most of what we want to know about Milton's relations to his father, his three wives, and some of his friends : and more than we want to know about his relations to his daughters. For in all these cases he has told us himself what they were : or if not he, then they or some authoritative witness from close at hand like his nephew Phillips. Of his opinions in most matters of Church and State we have abundant, almost too abundant, evidence out of his own mouth. Of all this in the case of Shakespeare there is nothing. We can conjecture and argue, if we choose, from indirect evidence, but of his feelings about father or wife or children, or of his religious or political opinions, we have absolutely no direct knowledge. Even in the Sonnets, where for once he speaks directly, he certainly does not speak plainly.

The facts behind them are still an unsolved enigma. On the whole it must be said that we do not know him as son or husband or father at all ; and as citizen or patriot, as the holder of this rather than that view in the religious or political discussions of his day, we only know him through such indications as we believe ourselves able to extract from his plays. Even as poet he remains, as far as it is possible for any man who has written so much to remain, behind the curtain of impersonality. All that we see clearly is the man of business, passing by various stages which we can still trace from poverty to something like riches, as Milton was to travel the opposite road from riches to comparative poverty. Just as a great man's monument on a church wall tells, or used to tell, the names of his father and his wife, his offices and honours and estates, while of the man himself it tells and can tell nothing, so with Shakespeare. Of his loves, faiths, hopes, fears he only allows us to guess ; of the heights which made the plays possible we only catch glimpses through the plays themselves ; like that mountain to which Matthew Arnold compares him he ' spares but the cloudy border of his base To the foil'd searching of mortality'. All that we can be said really to know of Shakespeare himself is a pleasant companion who left the impression of a man of genius on competent judges, an impression which they have rather recorded than explained ; a lovable man ' of an open and free nature ', as Ben Jonson said ; and a prosperous man of affairs who like so many other Englishmen, then and since, made a fortune rather quickly in London and then retired to his native place to enjoy his wealth and importance among the acquaintances of his youth.

His life, as we have seen, extended over just fifty-two years, a half-century big with fateful events in the political and intellectual history of England. In public affairs, so far as we know, Shakespeare played no part. For doing so

he had neither the opportunities nor, we may be almost sure, the inclination of Milton. In the reign of Elizabeth the country was governed by the queen and her Council; and few others, even members of Parliament, had any chance of becoming actors on the political stage. Certainly an actor on the common theatrical stage had none. And, if the guesses of those who are most likely to guess right may be trusted, Shakespeare was probably quite content to attend to his own business and leave Church and State to those to whom God and the queen had entrusted them.

Yet, if he had no share in making history in his own day, he may almost be said to have been making it ever since. Was it not Marlborough who said that he had learnt all the English history he knew out of Shakespeare's plays? And one may be sure that in his case as in others the learning Shakespeare provides was of the sort which is not content with informing the mind but stirs the blood and inspires the will. The author of *Richard II*, *Henry V*, and *King John* certainly has his place among the builders of the British Empire. It is a place absolutely unsought and undreamt of: we can imagine him, after the fashion of Scott in similar circumstances, laughing away such talk as mere nonsense when applied to a player who acted and wrote to get his living and amuse the idle part of the public. But it is true, nevertheless. 'We must be free or die, who speak the tongue That Shakespeare spake.' And we must be great, too, with no ignoble greatness of mere prosperity, but with one of another order, one that quickens the imagination and uplifts the spirit. England was still just England in Shakespeare's day, not the heart of a world of allied Commonwealths; and Shakespeare was no political visionary in this field or any other. Here as elsewhere, what he saw was what actually existed:

> This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in the silver sea

Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed and famous by their birth,
Renowned for their deeds as far from home,
For Christian service and true chivalry,
As is the sepulchre in stubborn Jewry
Of the world's ransom, blessed Mary's Son.

When he wrote those words he may have thought of Richard of the Lion Heart, but in any case he was not prophesying Lord Allenby; and he could never have dreamt that his great words would prove far truer of the England that was to be three hundred years after his death than they were of the England of that brother of the Black Prince in whose mouth he puts the words, or even of the England of Richard I whose name was for so long, and perhaps still is, a legendary one in the East. Still less would he have believed that he himself could ever be cóunted to have had any part, however remote, in the miracle of the final delivery of the Holy Land by troops many of whom came, and all of whom were commanded by one who came, from this little island which he had known and loved and praised so well. Yet it is no fanciful exaggeration to say that he had. The ultimate victory in war is to the spirit. It is true that great contributions were made to the spirit of England by some of those who built up the body of her military and political strength, and, in counting up its makers, we must always remember among the greatest Drake and Elizabeth, Cromwell and Marlborough, Wolfe and Chatham, Pitt and Wellington, and the supreme and heroic genius of Nelson. But the thought of them must not make us forget the part played by the poets who have all along moved the minds that have moved the nation, whose words are deeds which directly, and not merely indirectly like those of the soldiers and statesmen, influence the lives of men born centuries

after they were written. And among these, if the most instant and conscious were Milton and Wordsworth, the most persistent and universal has probably been the almost unconscious Shakespeare. For in this matter, as in others, the more open nature and wider sympathies of Shakespeare have opened doors to him that were closed to the sterner and narrower natures of the two poets of deliberate and self-dedicated patriotism.

Shakespeare's influence in this field has of course been mainly exercised through his historical plays. These cover a long stretch of our history, the whole period from the accession of Richard II to the death of Richard III, more than a hundred years ; and there is one play dealing with the brief reign of King John, a century earlier than Richard II, and one with Henry VIII who died only seventeen years before Shakespeare was born. Not all these plays are entirely the work of Shakespeare. A very large part of *Henry VI*, the earliest, and a large part of *Henry VIII*, the latest, are almost certainly by other hands. The historical play was no invention of Shakespeare's. On the contrary, as Sir Sidney Lee says, that kind of drama was already 'rousing immense enthusiasm in English audiences' ; and in this matter, as in others, Shakespeare took what he found, gave what was asked for, and converted what came to him from hack dramatists and the crude tastes of raw playgoers into a product of genius and a possession for all time. Indeed, he was a hack dramatist himself. His plays were written to order, in the common way of theatrical business, with no higher immediate object than that of filling a house or pleasing the queen and court ; only that Shakespeare, in finding the asses he was sent to seek and was no doubt resolved to find, could not but, being what he was, also find the kingdom which he no more than Saul had sought or dreamt of ; could not but half consciously stumble upon that inheritance of immortality which is the kingdom of genius.

The whole of Shakespeare's plays were probably written in the course of only twenty years ; and all the historical plays but one—*Henry VIII*, probably the last play which he touched—belong to the first decade of his activity. By the time that he had finished *Henry V*, the most famous and the most national of them all, he must have felt that he had exhausted the material provided for the stage by the history of England, even if his mind had not already begun to turn more and more to other subjects. There were dangers in coming nearer to his own time : when he did take up the reign of Henry VIII it was not till after Henry's daughter had ceased to reign. The Norman period was perhaps too remote for history ; and of the Plantagenet he had already done the reign of John, and others had done the only other two which could tempt him, those of Edward II and Edward III. The first subject had been dealt with by Marlowe in the play which is his masterpiece : and Shakespeare would have felt at once that this was not a play of the order of those which he tore to pieces and re-shaped to make his *King John* and *Henry V*. He had probably worked with Marlowe on *Henry VI* ; and other plays, notably *Richard III* and *The Merchant of Venice*, owe very visible debts to the creator of *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*. It was already certain before Marlowe's premature death that the genius of Shakespeare must leave him, had indeed already left him, far behind. That event took place in 1593, and if, as some believe, *Romeo and Juliet* was written in 1591 or 1592, Shakespeare had already produced a play which in its single splendour of poetry, pathos, and humour utterly outshines and outvalues the whole work of Marlowe. Still, of the dramatists whom Shakespeare found in possession of the stage, Marlowe is the only one whose genius retains an independent value when placed in the presence of his ; and Shakespeare would have felt at once that the subject of Edward II, on which

Marlowe had lavished his full powers, was one that had been handled once for all. If he was to challenge Marlowe's treatment of it he would do it indirectly in his rendering of a similar story, that of *Richard II*, where he carries beyond the possibilities known to Marlowe the beauty and pathos that may attach themselves to the fall from greatness even of an empty and vicious trifler, if we can be made to know him as a human being and see his tragedy with his own eyes, as he saw it himself. On the other possible subject for an historical play, the reign of Edward III, there was also a play already in existence. Its authorship is uncertain, and part or all of it has been ascribed to Shakespeare with varying degrees of confidence by several good critics, including Tennyson, the fineness of whose literary judgements has never yet received the recognition which his poetry once received in such lavish measure and has now partially and for a moment lost. It was he who first discovered the now generally accepted presence of the hand of Fletcher in *Henry VIII*, and his belief that that of Shakespeare is to be found in *Edward III* is not to be lightly set aside. But whether this is or is not so, it is likely enough that Shakespeare felt that the victories in France, the only thing in Edward III's reign which would greatly attract him, were only a rehearsal for those of his hero Henry V, and that for him the one subject forbade his giving his full strength to the other.

This long series of plays stretches, as we have seen, across a period of over three hundred and fifty years of English history. There are large gaps in it. We get nothing about the long reign, so critical and important in our political development, of Henry III, the only English sovereign whose name is mentioned by Dante who mentions so many of France, Germany and his own country. But Henry III does not perhaps lend himself very well to the purposes of the theatre He has neither the vices of John nor the

weaknesses and misfortunes of Edward II and Richard II ; nor is he a successful adventurer like Henry IV, a hero like Henry V, or a monster like Richard III. His son, too, the greatest of English kings, is another and somewhat more surprising gap. But the great administrator and lawgiver was not for the stage ; and one would like to think, though possibly without any justification, that Shakespeare preferred to avoid glorifying a king who, whatever his services to England, had left a detested name both in conquered Wales and unconquered Scotland.

What are we to say of Shakespeare's treatment of the national history ? The first answer is that he treated history as he treated everything else, in the manner and fashion of his time ; infinitely uplifting and ennobling that fashion, but not setting it aside. His historical plays are conceived often on the general lines of their predecessors : for instance, they are rather fragments or chronicles than dramas proper : and the dramatist in him shows itself rather in the new power and life-like truth of the characters than in any such linking of them together as would have converted a succession of episodes into a single dramatic action. All through his career, indeed, unity, perhaps the first of all essentials in drama, is the one least valued by the greatest of all dramatists ; and of course this indifference is most conspicuous in the Histories, where art and imagination were partly hampered and limited by known facts which could not be altogether re-shaped at a poet's will. He had to take these facts and make the best he could out of them. Not that here or elsewhere Shakespeare ever gives the impression of the pained artist struggling with intractable material, and reluctantly accepting something less than the perfect creation which he could not but see while he renounced it. That is Milton, all but the something less and the renunciation, and Keats including it ; but it is not Shakespeare. Of him we feel that he can always do what he likes,

and do it with ease, and that he is content with what he has done. It is not the facts of history that prevented him from making perfect dramas of the story of the English kings. It is simply that he found the following of the old plays and chronicles the ready way to his hand, and the way expected by his public: and he followed it, and made the best of it, a best no one before him had so much as conceived to be possible.

And, of course, he also accepted the conceptions of history which were prevalent in his day and long after. The modern historian commonly devotes his chief attention to the social, economic, and political changes of the period with which he is dealing, treating them as they affect the whole nation, and not from the point of view of the fortunes of rival sovereigns; and he often prefers the study of peace to the chronicles of war. But these were not the ways of those who thought about history in the days of Elizabeth. The history of England was then, as indeed it remained in the popular books till quite lately, the story of the doings and sufferings of the royal house, and especially of its wars at home and abroad. This is exactly what it is in Shakespeare's plays. And there is no reason to suppose that Shakespeare wished to change the current conceptions of history, or thought or cared much about any other kind than that which he found in possession. He was not a man born before his time, and anticipating the thoughts of future centuries, in this or other respects. On the contrary he was a man in one sense purely of his own age, in another of no single age, but of all, and above them all. It was not for him to say or even see that Magna Charta, of which he takes no notice, was more important than the loss of Normandy or the claims of Arthur, out of which he makes his *King John*: nor that the Black Death and the social changes to which it led were more important than the quarrels between Richard II and his uncles, and the disappearance of the feudal nobility than the struggle between

Red Rose and White which brought it about. He was not merely a man of his own age, he was a poet and an artist; that is, one driven at once by interest and by temperament to take the personal view of history. For poetry, painting, sculpture, above all for drama, it is certain that no body of men can ever challenge the interest of an individual. It is as impossible to make a hero of a parliament or a people as it is to paint a people's portrait. Constance and Arthur may have had no influence over the fate of England, but their own fates have been followed for three hundred years with breathless interest by readers and spectators whom no conceivable picture of Magna Charta would have moved at all. It is to this day a great political advantage of Monarchy that it provides a person for imagination and loyalty to concentrate upon. All experience shows how much more easily they are roused, and how much more tenaciously they cling, when the object offered to them is no mere abstraction or institution but a man; and how this is still more true if the man be the son and grandson of men who have been loved and honoured, or even merely accepted as part of the established order of things, by the fathers and grandfathers of those who find him ruling them in his turn. Hereditary sovereignty obviously has disadvantages as well as advantages; but the world will be a good deal older before it takes as much interest in a County Council as it does in a king. And this is still more certain of the great men whose greatness is not inherited but of their own making. It is curious how few there are in the Shakespearean Histories: scarcely any whom one at once remembers except Wolsey; and he, oddly enough, occurs in a doubtful play, and may not come from Shakespeare's hand at all. There could not be a stronger proof of how entirely Shakespeare acquiesced in the royal chronicle point of view of the history of England. It was left for later generations to concentrate attention rather upon real greatness than upon

the merely hereditary or official. But for the purposes of the drama, which demands free action of the individual will, just what is unattainable in any kind of committee, that does not greatly matter. For it, inherited greatness, even if it be inherited by a fool or a criminal, a Richard II or a Richard III, is as effective as the natural greatness of Wolsey. All that it asks is a human being, alive and free, taking or losing the opportunities life brings, exhibiting the character which for himself and others is destiny, and suffering in his own person and theirs the resultant fate. Even if Tolstoy's view of the unimportance of the individual in human affairs could be accepted by history, it is certain that it could never be accepted by the drama.

Yet, though Shakespeare's histories are more royal than national, more personal than political, that is a long way from being all they are. They are no mere pageants of kingship in war and peace. Certainly they are no courtier's history of England. No republican could demand a better text for a sermon against personal monarchy than he can find in scene after scene in every one of Shakespeare's histories. What incompetence, treachery, cruelty, indifference to any interest but their own, the kings again and again exhibit! And was there ever such a procession of faithlessness as is to be found in Shakespeare's Histories? One cannot keep up with it: it is positively bewildering to the modern reader. Philip is all for Arthur and Constance, and on the loftiest grounds, one moment; and the next he has deserted them and is in alliance with John. He and Austria have no sooner betrayed Arthur than they betray John. The marriage of Lewis and Blanche is no sooner made than broken. Pandulph betrays Philip, and then John. Lewis betrays first Arthur, then Blanche, and then the English Lords. John is now ready to defy and denounce the Pope; and before the reader has recovered from his surprise, whether of pleasure or indignation, at

Thou canst not, cardinal, devise a name
So slight, unworthy and ridiculous,
To charge me to an answer, as the pope,

he finds John ready to hold his kingdom as the Pope's vassal! Indeed the whole play is a carnival of treachery, and but for its grimness might almost read like a comedy of political errors of which the realist Bastard writes the epitaph :

Mad world! mad kings! mad composition!

and the romantic Constance the just judgement and sentence :

Arm, arm, you heavens, against these perjured Kings!

It is the same in all the Histories. The English kings were no worse than other men of their day, no doubt, except so far as great place has great temptations and deprives its occupants of those saving checks by which other men are protected against themselves. But there they are, set on the awful hill of Shakespeare's genius ; the usurping and conscience-stricken John, the idle and empty Richard, the crafty founder of the House of Lancaster and its hardly human destroyer and ultimate victim! The ugly list is scarcely relieved by the heroic victor of Agincourt whose conquests were so purposeless and so shortlived, or by the saintly weakness of his son.

And it is not merely the kings. The plays scarcely provide more material for the indictment of monarchy than for that of aristocracy. No doubt, when every man is playing a game in which his own head is one of the stakes, it is not to be wondered at that oaths are broken and friendships forgotten in a moment at a changing breath of fortune. It is the same everywhere. The nobles in *King John* have hardly sworn their faith to Lewis before they transfer it back to John. The nobles in *Richard II* are neither loyal to the king nor to each other. Mowbray confesses that he had attempted Gaunt's life and Gaunt that he had a share

in Woodstock's death ; Aumerle lies to Bolingbroke, Richard to Gaunt ; they all lie about Gloucester's death ; everybody is false to everybody else, except the Bishop of Carlisle and the poor groom who went to the prison wishing to see his master's face again and told the tale of 'roan Barbary'. So in *Henry IV* : the treachery of the king is rewarded by treachery, and that treachery is tricked to its punishment by a peculiarly base breach of honour on the part of the virtuous Prince John. Even *Henry V* has its prelude of treachery in the almost purposeless conspiracy of Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey. *Henry VI* has all the treacheries of the Roses, especially those of Warwick and Clarence and those of the devil whose very nature was treachery and murder. Even in the play which bears that devil's name and is filled with his abominations the poet, or his story, finds room for the falsehood of Hastings and Buckingham by the side of their master's grosser crimes. And so in *Henry VIII* Buckingham is betrayed by treachery and Wolsey is tyrant at least, if not half traitor, before he is victim.

It almost makes the history of England a chronicle of royal and noble crimes. So Shakespeare received it and so he was content to tell it. One might almost expect it to be as dull as a continuous course of police reports. And *Henry VI*, especially the First Part, is nearly that ; indeed it is more dull than criminal, a chronicle which has not yet begun to be turned into a play and remains a mere succession of rather lifeless episodes in which hardly any of the actors make a pretence of being alive. Happily we need not give Shakespeare the credit or discredit of it. The change begins in Part II, though even this has nothing whatever of a drama in it except that its very first scene gives us the marriage with Margaret and the claim of York, and thus strikes the prelude of the war which is its subject. The play is all a proud, high-spirited business ; full of feudal boasting, violence, treachery, insecurity ; often told

with the high eloquence which Marlowe and Shakespeare, both of whose hands are thought to be seen in it, had always at command. But there was something else at Shakespeare's command. And it appears here in the Jack Cade scene, where Shakespeare shows for the first time, but not for the last, the merciless clearsightedness which is mingled with his quick and understanding sympathy for the common people. Every word Jack Cade and his folk say has the stamp of truth, and many have the stamp of humour which always means at least a measure of sympathy. The work of Shakespeare was to turn stage puppets into human beings ; and though kings and nobles are his chief actors his humanizing touch is not more conspicuous in them than in their servants. Indeed, the servants and clowns are often more living than their masters : and of course constantly more amusing. Shakespeare evidently takes a personal pleasure in Maria and Feste, in Lance and Lancelot Gobbo and all his company of Fools ; he not only understands but likes, almost loves, them. They are the raw stuff of humanity, with blood coursing visibly in their veins and the light of laughter playing in their eyes, and none of Henry V's 'ceremony' to conceal either. In his handling of them Shakespeare shows all the positive and none of the negative meaning of Burns's 'a man 's a man for a' that'. Burns's democratic outbursts are partly a reaction against the flattery and desertion he had experienced from Edinburgh society. Shakespeare never reacted. In spite of the *Sonnets* we may be quite sure that his cool head was never turned. He accepted his patrons, and used them ; for one of them he evidently had a passionate affection ; but he was not the man to let young nobles charm him away from his business, which was to do his work and make his way in the world. So he had nothing to react from ; nothing to make him see nobles blacker or plain men whiter than they actually were ; nothing to close his

eyes to the fact which he sets forth in the Jack Cade scenes with such relentless humour and truth that, at least in the world as he knew it, it was better to be governed by great men than by a mob which no sooner acts as a mob than it shows itself weak, cruel, fickle, and absurd. Still, if any one is disposed to think that these scenes go a point or two beyond justice, he may remember, if he likes, that Shakespeare was a practical man and always kept his audiences in view; and that the part of them which counted most for success or failure was the group of courtly and aristocratic patrons of the theatre.

After *Henry VI*, *Richard III*; an advance, but not into Shakespeare's own dramatic kingdom. It has always been a popular play from the days of Burbage to those of Garrick and later. Its noise and bustle give it a kind of crude effectiveness on the stage; and the extravagance of its language, incidents and whole conception often attracts the young who are slow to learn how much greater truth is than violence, and the human voice than stage thunder. But unlike most of Shakespeare's work it does not wear well: it does not reveal new strength at even the second or third reading, and certainly not at the fiftieth. Richard is the whole play, and already in the first page he is what he remains to the last. His villanies are not what they are in true drama, the successive fruits of the marriage of character and circumstance. They are all born before their time, unnaturally, out of the head of the monster who is their single parent and proclaims their birth at the beginning and long before they are ripe for action. There are, besides, too many incidents in the play in which extravagance passes into incredibility: the wooing of Anne is at least as absurd as it is famous; and Richard's persuasion of the queen to give him her daughter equally passes beyond the bounds of possibility. But Shakespeare is still Shakespeare in *Richard III*, though he tries so hard to be only Marlowe.

Even the incredible scene with Anne ends with the Shakespearean

> Upon my life, she finds, although I cannot,
> Myself to be a marvellous proper man.
> I'll be at charges for a looking-glass ;

and it is a hint of a riper Shakespeare than that of *Richard III* which makes the crooked plotter break out in the next scene with

> Cannot a plain man live and think no harm,
> But thus his simple truth must be abused
> By silken, sly, insinuating Jacks ?

Similar strokes elsewhere enable Shakespeare to make his stage villain live as well as move. And however far the scene of the death of Clarence may fall short of Shakespeare's riper and better manner, it is a splendid example of his almost infinite opulence of language and imagination. There is, perhaps, one other thing to note. Shakespeare, who dealt so much in crime, was early occupied with the thought of conscience. We get more than one glimpse in *Richard III* of what was to play so great a part in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

The next play was probably *Richard II* which is again a play in which one figure fills the whole stage. The king is everything in it ; but the everything is as unlike that of *Richard III* as it could well be. There we have the picture of cunning and violence hurrying furiously from murder to suicide : here we have weakness and folly passing on their primrose path from pleasure, vanity, fine phrases and incompetence to failure, desertion, and death. Richard III acts ; Richard II only suffers. Of action he is incapable : for action requires will, and he has nothing but desire. From the first he displays the fickle irresolution always to be observed in men of mere desire and sentiment. Principles of action, good or bad, of this world or another, he has none ; he tosses irresolute on a sea of fancies with neither

god nor devil at his helm. The very first scene shows the stuff of which he is made. He will have Mowbray and Bolingbroke accept a reconciliation; but when they will not he at once submits, and all the satisfaction his kingship gets is the self-flattering words with which he graces his defeat:

> We were not born to sue but to command.

And so all through the play. Again and again he changes at a word. He orders the duel and stops it at the very last moment. He sentences Bolingbroke to ten years' exile and commutes it to six at a look, without even a spoken word, from Gaunt. In the third Act his conduct, or rather his succession of moods, for he does nothing, is the very picture of irresolution. He has hardly finished posturing with the comforting assurance that the very earth will turn her stones into soldiers at the call of the king, making lovely speeches to convince himself that

> Not all the water in the rough rude sea
> Can wash the balm from an anointed king,

when at a stroke of bad news he is at once sure that all is lost and advises all to leave him. But that mood instantly passes at a reminder of his kingship:

> Is not the king's name twenty thousand names?

And then that, too, is hardly uttered before it is changed to

> The worst is death, and death will have his day.

And, even after that, there is one more brief recovery, immediately followed by:

> Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth
> Of that sweet way I was in to despair!

There is the dominant note of the theme: the 'sweet way' to despair. For men of his type all is sensation: when he is confronted with the demand for a decision his answer is 'Ay, no: no, ay', as in the abdication scene; he and such

as he neither wish to act nor can. What they ask for and must have is, for their minds a succession of dreams, for their bodies a continuous luxury of sensations ; and their love of passiveness is such that they will make a luxury of pain and shame and death itself. The end is Nirvana, always the ultimately welcome haven of the senses which have deluded themselves with the pleasant fancy that they are the whole and not a subordinate part of man :

> whate'er I be,
> Nor I nor any man that but man is
> With nothing shall be pleased, till he be eased
> With being nothing.

And yet there are people, two at least of whom one would be sorry to call fools, who will have it that this poor creature was a kind of favourite child in the eyes of that rare unity of wisdom and strength which we know by the name of William Shakespeare ! They tell us that Richard II failed ' a little because he lacked some qualities that were doubtless common among his scullions, but more because he had certain qualities that are uncommon in all ages ' ; and that he was certainly ' greater in the divine Hierarchies ' than Henry V, who is ' the one common-place man ' in the Histories. Fools such critics are, whatever their distinction, at least in one dangerous way of folly. They cannot endure the humility of seeing with all men's eyes or telling a truth that has been told before. And so they must needs have Richard II as the ' vessel of porcelain ' and Henry V as the ' vessel of clay '. For their own choice Mr. Yeats and Mr. Masefield are free. Only they must not father it upon Shakespeare. No man has ever known the theatre better than he ; and if he had meant us to admire Richard and despise Henry we should most assuredly not have escaped doing it ; but there is no audience from his day to ours which has not instantly and instinctively worshipped Henry and pitied Richard. One

might as well be asked to believe that Shakespeare liked Iago better than the less intellectual Othello, or meant us to prefer Macbeth, who makes such wonderful speeches, far finer even than Richard's, and can do things, too, which Richard cannot, to the plain virtues of Banquo or Macduff. No : Shakespeare knew always what he was doing ; and it is not by mistake or incompetence that he has made it clear to us that the feeling he had meant us to have for his Richard is one not of admiration but of pity.

The mistake of course comes just from that. Because Shakespeare was so profoundly and so widely human he could not but love all or very nearly all his creatures, though pity is the only form love can take with some of them. But it is the merest delusion to fancy, because he has been inside them all and knows how they appear to themselves and can give each of them a voice to state his case, that he accepts their statement or sees them as they see themselves. That is the madness which has made some people fancy he meant Shylock to be a sympathetic figure ; Shylock, almost whose first word, a word spoken only to his own ears, is

> If I can catch him once upon the hip,
> I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.

To Shakespeare Shylock is not the monster of crime, nor Richard II the monster of folly, which he might be to other people. Neither is for him incredible or inexplicable : he has in his hands the thread which unravels the mystery. But that does not mean that he does not judge them and make us do so.

For the rest, the play is remarkable for its beauty. For the first time in the Histories, Shakespeare allows free scope to his poetic powers. It is even possible that *Richard II* may be the first play of any kind in which they were seen in full and final energy ; for though *Romeo and Juliet* was probably begun earlier it probably received its last touches

of revision later. Mr. Dover Wilson, one of the best living authorities on the chronology of the plays, writes to me: 'If I were lecturing on the development of Shakespeare's art, I should unhesitatingly plump for *Romeo* as the first dramatic and poetic theme that really carried him off his feet. He was working at it, off and on, over a space of five years, writing some time in the same period the *Tragedy of Richard II*. *Richard* may have been written at one go. Anyhow, it seems to have fewer clues pointing to revision.' 'The chances are that Shakespeare was working at the prompt-book of *Romeo* after he had done with *Richard II*.' But, however that may be, the poetry of *Richard II*, if a little cloying sometimes, is often as lovely as anything even Shakespeare ever wrote, and has, as we have seen, so intoxicated people specially susceptible to poetic beauty that they have fancied Richard himself to be as beautiful as the poetry made about him. Some of the best known of Shakespearean lines come from this play. Besides Gaunt's great speech it contains other fine things put into the same mouth, such as

> O, but they say the tongues of dying men
> Enforce attention like deep harmony;

and

> All places that the eye of heaven visits
> Are to a wise man ports and happy havens:

and there is Richard's

> For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
> And tell sad stories of the death of kings:

and his

> Music do I hear?
> Ha! ha! keep time: how sour sweet music is,
> When time is broke and no proportion kept!
> So is it in the music of men's lives.

That note in which all life, joy and sadness, weakness and strength, hears itself as a harmony, sees itself as a picture, will never again be absent from Shakespeare's work. But

it is not the conspicuous feature of the next historical play. *King John* contains beautiful things in the speeches of Constance and the scenes in which Arthur appears, but its great achievement is that in it for the first time Shakespeare brings the typical Englishman upon the stage. Indeed, there are three great advances in *King John*. For the first time England, the ideal heroic England of Shakespeare's own day, comes to the front of the stage. The great speech of Gaunt in *Richard II* had indeed put it there for a moment, and such a moment as it scarcely has again. But in *Richard II* there is no foreign enemy and especially no enemy on English soil: there is no 'Italian priest' presuming to 'tithe and toll in our dominions'; and there is no true-born and natural Englishman, as full of laughter and common sense as of loyalty, to speak in England's name and utter her defiance to all the world.

> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue
> If England to itself do rest but true.

It must be admitted that Shakespeare, who invents so rarely, did not even invent that. His *King John* not only follows very closely an older play (of which it only omits four scenes) in being a story of ignoble treacheries and inglorious wars: it follows it in being wholly patriotic, Protestant, and in fact Elizabethan. Here is the note:

> If England's peers and people join in one
> Nor Pope, nor France, nor Spain can do them wrong.

That shows us what Shakespeare does: he does not invent; he renews, intensifies, ennobles. So with the Bastard Faulconbridge whom he makes the voice of England. He also comes out of the *Troublesome Raigne of King John*; but in Shakespeare's hands he is new born and becomes not only the first pure Englishman but the first true human being, compact of blood and brains and heart, who appears in the

Historical plays. He comes laughing on to the stage; a 'rude man', a 'good blunt fellow', a 'madcap'; and in his voice and the 'large composition of the man', we already hear a note which will sound louder later on when he is divided into two halves, each greater than the original whole, as Falstaff and Henry V. He shows himself at once a man, one who cares more for being himself than for lands and rents: 'I am I, howe'er I was begot'; a man fit for Elizabethan adventures with Drake and Raleigh, one with a 'mounting spirit',

> The very spirit of Plantagenet:

and yet quite as much a man of plain and remorseless fact:

> Madam, I was not old Sir Robert's son:
> Sir Robert might have eat his part in me
> Upon Good Friday and ne'er broke his fast:

a pricker of all bubbles of unreality even about himself;

> And why rail I on this Commodity?
> But for because he hath not woo'ed me yet;

and still more of course about others, as may be seen all through in his torturing chaff of poor Austria. Yet, practical man as he is, the first to suggest that France and England should join their arms against the 'scroyles of Angiers' who flout them both in turn, and the very man to defy bell, book, and candle when the business is to make fat monks pay for the defence of the England in which they live so comfortably, he is as honest in deed as in word. It is not the men who say 'Gain be my lord' who really worship her: they are criticizing themselves and comparing Gain with other gods when they say it. Her true worshippers are not so much as aware that any other god exists. So the Bastard is not the kind of man whom John could confide his guilty secret to; he knows nothing of the plans of murdering Arthur; and when he sees him dead he quite agrees with Pembroke about the business, and though he

is a plain man and cannot turn his indignation into eloquence and poetry as Pembroke does :

> All murders past do stand excused in this,
> And this, so sole and so unmatchable,
> Shall give a holiness, a purity
> To the yet unbegotten sin of times.

He can say what he feels without wincing .

> It is a damned and a bloody work :

and a little later he can overwhelm Hubert with reproaches. Yet his insight does not fail him ; he believes Hubert's denial of guilt, and lets him bear the body away. And then, as if to give the touch of natural weakness that will prevent his courage, strength, and humour from becoming inhuman, he breaks out :

> I am amazed, methinks, and lose my way
> Among the thorns and dangers of this world.

But that mood only lasts a moment. There is a kingdom to be saved, and a practical man like the Bastard has no time for doubt or sorrow. John may be a scoundrel but he is King of England ; and he must be made to act with vigour and the nation to rally round him. So at once we see him arousing the king :

> Be great in act, as you have been in thought ;
> Let not the world see fear and sad distrust
> Govern the motion of a kingly eye :
> . . . so shall inferior eyes,
> That borrow their behaviours from the great,
> Grow great by your example and put on
> The dauntless spirit of resolution.

He wants no peace purchased by the Pope but one secured by English strength and courage ; and though in the end it is a peace arranged by the Legate that he accepts, it is in substance a peace of victory and of English unity and independence. The lords have returned to their allegiance, and the final note is that which after the wars of the

Roses was always in English minds, the fear and hate of civil war :

> This England never did, nor never shall,
> Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror
> But when it first did help to wound itself.
> Now these her princes are come home again,
> Come the three corners of the world in arms,
> And we shall shock them.

King John is a richer play than any previous History. *Henry IV*, the next of the Histories, is much more than that. It is one of the very greatest of all the works of Shakespeare. It is not merely that Falstaff, though not so great a creation as Hamlet or Macbeth, is even more entirely Shakespearean, more absolutely out of the reach of any other man. It is that he is not only alive himself but the cause of life in other men. Whenever he is present every man comes alive and finds words which show at once what manner of man he is. And every woman, too. There are not many of them, and they are not very edifying figures. But they are actual flesh and blood, visible and almost tangible. For the first time, with the possible exception of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare gives us women who are not merely, or indeed not at all, beautiful or eloquent or touching, but are amusing. Margaret and Constance, Silvia and Helena and Juliet, who are so many greater things, are not that. In *Henry IV* Shakespeare proves that he can elicit the answer of life, and therefore the spring of sympathy, out of the coarsest and dullest human clay, a Bardolph, a Justice Shallow, a Doll Tearsheet ; and that is the greatness of the play and the quality which, in its variety and abundance, carries it far beyond any of the earlier Histories.

As a play it still has many faults. As usual the great personages are rather too much like stage figures. Shakespeare would not be himself if he were not often, by soliloquies and otherwise, trying to make us realize that great

men have, behind their fine clothes and official actions and utterances, a life and feelings which are very like those of other men. But he does not do this nearly so successfully in the Histories as he does in the pure dramas. His kings and nobles remain too much in the position which they occupy for the mass of men in the real world. We see what they look like and what they do, as we see a Prime Minister or a Field-marshal to-day : what most of them are we do not know and scarcely think about. They are like the actors who present them on the stage, whom we think of as Falstaff or Hamlet, not as what they are directly they have taken their false clothes off ; husbands or fathers, sinners or saints. And the play is still full of small technical flaws which Shakespeare would hardly have let pass a few years later when he had given up History. Both in the First Part and in the Second there is a scene in which the King, after reproaching the Prince with his faults, learns his true character ; but he begins the second as blind as he began the first. So Vernon's enthusiastic praises of Prince Hal and his soldiers seem scarcely dramatically probable in his mouth ; and, in the Second Part, Warwick in one place recognizes and in another is blind to the true nature of the Prince. A more serious and more often discussed matter is the occasional praises of Falstaff as a soldier.[1] Good judges have used them to build up a defence of his character ; but no ingenuities of pleading will avail against the impression made by the play both in the closet and on the stage on almost every reader and spectator from Shakespeare's day to our own. Shakespeare knew what he was doing ; and if he had not meant Falstaff to be coward and liar, assuredly he would not have allowed us to take him for both, as we always have ever since. The inconsistency, then, remains ; and the explanation probably is that the

[1] See *The Rejection of Falstaff* in Mr. A. C. Bradley's 'Oxford Lectures on Poetry', to which I ventured to make some reply in *A Note on Falstaff*, printed in 'A Book of Homage to Shakespeare', edited by I. Gollancz, 1916.

influence of the character of the actual historical Sir John Fastolf (as well perhaps as of Sir John Oldcastle, the original name given to the character) acted on the mind of the dramatist, never the most careful of writers, and caused the introduction of touches that were true enough to history but untrue to what was so much greater than history, the Falstaff who was born of Shakespeare's imagination.

In all these ways the play has obvious defects. It lives, first, by a few splendid outbursts of poetry, such as some of Hotspur's speeches and the king's great apostrophe to sleep which contains the line Matthew Arnold liked to quote as a touchstone of poetic style :

In cradle of the rude imperious surge.

Then, by the Shakespearean laugh, 'broad as ten thousand beeves at pasture', which here first obtains its full royalty of freedom, never to recapture quite the same abundance, certainty, and felicity. Then, by the quantity of prose in it, another new feature : all the earlier Histories are almost entirely in verse. And it is prose in two senses : the prose of life as well as the prose of literature. The single scene of Jack Cade's men, the single character of the Bastard, here become a world of ordinary, or lower and less than ordinary, men and women, more conscious of their five senses than of the ten commandments. The prose scenes provide relief to the poetic, after the fashion Shakespeare was to use so much in future ; a fashion in which, according to our mood, we may hear discords jarring upon each other, or the different notes whose alternations and combinations make up the full harmony of human life. There is no doubt that there are readers to whom at certain moments Sir Toby and Dogberry and the rest seem blots of earth upon a vision of heaven. But the true Shakespearean mood is the other : that which asks for the whole, and, not content with the beauty, intensity, and mystery of human life which only seers and thinkers perceive and only poetry can render, demands also its dullness and grossness, flesh scarcely

touched at all by spirit, the visible life, plain to all men and concealing the reality of the other, the tale which only prose can tell. For them, Hamlet and Brutus may be the essential and eternal ; but man is not yet all eternal ; and to complete the picture of him, as they know him, they call for the Grave-digger and Falstaff as well. '*Homo* is a common name to all men' ; so this play tells us ; so it for the first time paints the picture of our life ; so indeed Shakespeare saw it.

Hotspur is the heroic figure born to failure, as the Prince is the same figure born to victory and success. The one is married to reality, the other to unreality. Hotspur's speeches are splendid things, the swansong of dying chivalry. He is the very type which Scott loved to recreate in his poems and mediaeval novels, the best side of which he put in that finest of his quatrains, which, for some of us at any rate, is much too authentically his to be given to any one else on the strength of its being found in a book of verses by one of his contemporaries. Scott lent as royally as he borrowed ; this is the single gold coin in the borrower's collection : and it is easy to guess where he got it.

> Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife !
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name.

Is not that almost an echo of Hotspur ?

> O gentlemen, the time of life is short !
> To spend that shortness basely were too long,
> If life did ride upon a dial's point,
> Still ending at the arrival of an hour.
> An if we live, we live to tread on kings ;
> If die, brave death, when princes die with us !

But there is another side, too, seen in Scott's heroes and seen in Shakespeare ; and Shakespeare visits it, as Scott did not always, with its natural doom of failure. Hotspur is from the first one of those 'rash inconsiderate fiery

voluntaries ' of whom Shakespeare speaks elsewhere. He begins by defying the king over rather a small matter, insulting the king's messenger about what knight errantry called a point of honour and other people a point of vanity ; his whole tone and manner is one of boyish bravado : though a lovable boy he is a fool. He is so busy ' plucking bright honour from the pale-faced moon ', and declaring that he will not yield an inch to the king, that he will not let his uncle get a word in to explain the scheme of their rebellion. As soon as he meets his confederates he takes pleasure in insulting them : he forgets the map which is the business of their meeting and proceeds to scoff at Glendower's supernatural pretensions, and then, a little later, at his poetic pretensions, ridiculing ' mincing poetry ' as a thing that sets his teeth on edge : not a very practical way of conducting negotiations with an important ally. But he hates prophets and poets and bores, and Glendower is a little of all three ; and he will ' tell truth and shame the devil ' rather than say a few smooth words to one whom he finds long-winded and tedious, ' worse than a smoky house '. One is not surprised to find that as soon as he has gained his point he throws it away. Evidently he only quarrelled for the sake of quarrelling. But we should not like him as we all do if he were merely this. There is more. He is no mere dithyrambist, ranting to the moon : he is a real hero. And, more still, Shakespeare has taken care that he is also a man. We see him chaffing his wife and refusing to tell her his secrets : we see him playing the silly young aristocrat flown with insolence, pouring scorn upon respectable shopkeeping citizens, and bidding his noble wife leave her modest vows and swear the good round oaths which, to a boy's ears, sound well in the mouth of an earl's daughter. But it is his wife who is right, and he who is wrong, when they talk policy. Indeed he is always wrong. Even the two things he does so magnificently, he always does to his own

destruction ; he talks when he should be silent and fights when he should retreat. Everything about him has the hurry, prematureness, and extravagance which can only end as they do. He who cannot learn to live must die, both in fiction and in truth. And so, deceived by his uncle, the 'hare-brained Hotspur' rushes gloriously unheeding on his fate, wishing his enemy were greater and finding him only too great. He dies with a burst of fine phrases ; and, though we love him, we find a kind of poetic justice in the fact that it is over his body that Falstaff utters his famous 'the better part of valour is discretion', and that the last we see of him is as the hero of Falstaff's preposterous fiction, the creature of a lie, fighting 'his long hour by Shrewsbury clock', and as usual for some one else's glory and advantage. Peace be to him for a beautiful, eloquent, aristocratic, unteachable, lovable boy !

The Prince may conveniently wait till we come to the play named after him. He is Shakespeare's subtle contrast to Hotspur. The large and obvious contrast is provided by Falstaff who is anything but beautiful or picturesquely aristocratic. Eloquent indeed he is with an eloquence supreme in its own order ; the absolutely free and perfect expression of the senses, and of the intellect used solely as the servant of the senses. And lovable too : who will deny it for an instant ? But his lovableness is exactly the opposite of Hotspur's. It belongs, like his eloquence, to another side of our human nature altogether, and the fact that we love these two opposites is a pleasant proof of what varied creatures we are, what contraries we keep within us. Hotspur wants to 'pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon', and we like him for it ; for we, too, have a strain of fancy, romance, and adventure in us. Falstaff 'likes not such grinning honour as Sir Walter hath', and analyses it all away into nothing with his 'Can honour set to a leg ?' and his 'who hath it ? He that died o' Wednesday'. And

we like him, too; for we all have plenty of selfish and sensual prose in us, and are at least half amused when it gets open and effective utterance. After all, we are always conscious of our senses; and only occasionally aware, alas, most of us, that we so much as possess souls. *Humani nihil.* There is no one who will deny his kinship with Falstaff; and this kind of kinship always means at least liking, if not love.

What is the secret of this wonderful being who is externally nothing but a gross old scoundrel, coward, liar, drunkard and worse, a mere cumberer of the earth and polluter of the air? And yet we love him, always want him on the stage, and learn his sayings by heart more often than any other prose of Shakespeare's. Why? Because he can tell us all about himself. *Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner.* But it is more than that. Knowing all is more than pardoning; it is nearly always loving. If Falstaff were silent and helpless of speech he would be nothing but a disreputable and disgusting old drunkard. But he is divinely gifted with ingenious thoughts and witty words; there is nothing that he dare not confess and nothing that he cannot make pleasant and plausible. He disarms our judgement: we delight in a man who more than any other man can pour the whole of himself into speech and reveal all mankind in revealing himself. No truthful man among us tells the whole truth as this liar tells it. How can we refuse to forgive him, like him, love him?

Then of course there is his humour, the most lovable of qualities. And his is of precisely the most lovable sort; for it is constantly directed against himself. That is part of the lovableness of such great writers as Horace, Cervantes, Scott: it is one of the chief charms of such letters as those of Cowper and Edward FitzGerald. There is a touch of it in Madame de Sévigné. But it is not a very French quality, and perhaps the only Frenchman who has it in abundance

is La Fontaine, naturally enough by far the best loved of French poets. Frenchmen admire Racine or Hugo ; they love *le bonhomme*. So with Falstaff. We cannot but have a kindly feeling for him directly he says such things as ' when I was about thy years, Hal, I was not an eagle's talon in the waist : I could have crept into any alderman's thumb-ring : a plague of sighing and grief ! it blows a man up like a bladder ' ; or complains that he has ' fallen away vilely ' and compares himself to ' an old lady's loose gown ' ; or declares that he has lost his voice with ' hallowing and singing of anthems ' ; or moralizes with half-Biblical, half-drunken eloquence, ' Dost thou hear, Hal ? thou knowest in the state of innocency Adam fell ; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villany ? Thou seest I have more flesh than another man, and therefore more frailty.' And when he plays the king's part and makes the king sing his praises we love him outright for a man who has that gift of genius, the power to see his own true picture and to laugh at it : ' a goodly portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent ; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage ; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or by 'r lady, inclining to three score : and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff ; if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me ; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks.'

What words he finds, this ugly old sinner, to make his way to our hearts with ! Does the prose of Shakespeare ever move with a more entire felicity both of phrase and of rhythm than in these speeches of his ? The truth is that Falstaff is artist as well as epicurean, and takes evident pleasure, like Dr. Johnson whom he resembles in more ways than one, in the surprise and felicities of his own talk. He always talks like a man playing on an instrument of which he knows he is a master. He laughs at Lancaster's promise to speak better of him than he deserves. ' I would you had but the wit : 'twere better than your dukedom.' And like

all artists he is impatient of people who do not understand his art. People must have ears to appreciate a musician ; to appreciate such a talker as Falstaff they must have quick wits. And though, as artists create art-lovers, he is not only witty in himself but the cause of wit in other men, yet, as some men are colour blind or tone deaf, so there are people in his day and ours not to be captivated by Falstaff's tongue. 'Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me : nor a man cannot make him laugh ; but that 's no marvel, he drinks no wine.' There is the Chief Justice, too. Sir John gives him of his very best in two incomparable scenes : it is to him that he proves his youth by the offer : 'he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money and have at him' ; it is to him that he says of himself : 'it was alway yet the trick of our English nation, if they have a good thing, to make it too common ;' it is before him that he escapes so victoriously from Mrs. Quickly's accusations : 'my lord, this is a poor mad soul : and she says up and down the town that her eldest son is like you'. Yet even such a pearl as this speech is cast in vain before the old judge who is plainly no connoisseur in wit ; and all it wins for Falstaff is a reproof about 'the throng of words that come with such more than impudent sauciness from you'. And, alas, the world is so made that, as we know, all his victories end in the great defeat : defeat at the hands of the very man who had all the faculties for enjoying his intellectual music ; to whom he rides post haste from Gloucestershire devising 'matter enough out of this Shallow to keep Prince Harry in continual laughter' and confident that 'it is much that a lie with a slight oath and a jest with a sad brow will do with a fellow that never had the ache in his shoulders'. But, unhappily, if the prince had never had the ache in his shoulders he now had the weight of a kingdom upon them. And that proved fatal to Falstaff. In enjoying life

and thinking and talking about it no man was ever in closer touch with reality; in the conduct of it, which is an affair of will and conscience as well as of intellect, he is never in touch with reality at all. And that is just what Henry V is, as we shall see, from first to last.

Henry IV is a greater play by far than *Henry V* mainly because in it Falstaff is almost constantly present, living and life-giving, while in *Henry V* we only get one picture of him, among the most wonderful scenes in Shakespeare, but brief and final, a mere death-bed on which nothing follows but the silence of the closed curtain. It is true Shakespeare had to bring him to life again in *The Merry Wives*, as Dumas had to give Chicot his resurrection when life proved too dull without him. But the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives*, though not so inferior to his old self as is often asserted, is not the triumphant genius of *Henry IV*. Some of the things which he says show him at his highest, show that the brains are still in him in all their power, though the last shreds of honour or self-respect have gone. Even in *Henry IV* he seldom says anything greater than 'O powerful love! that in some respects makes a beast a man; in some other, a man a beast!' But he is now a butt and a victim: a mere instance of how all the world despises the grey hairs which cover a fool; a proof, if we choose to be so cruel as to look at him curiously and seriously, of what a little way intellect alone can go to save life. In *Henry IV* he still can affect enough youth to blind us as well as himself to the inevitable end; and like him we enjoy the present without thought of the future. There he can still be king of his company and of all who, in every succeeding generation, are lucky enough, by Shakespeare's help, to come into it. With him Shakespeare turned the chronicle of things into a picture of human life, filled out the peace and war pageantry of history with the reality of the life of ordinary men and women which is always going on by its

side. The personal History becomes the universal Comedy, and it is on the rude, realist, unofficial, unceremonious side of the drama that he lavishes his genius most freely. The realism of genius, so different from the realism of industry with which we are too familiar, has entered here once for all into the Shakespearean drama and will soon kill the old semi-official chronicling History. In *Henry IV* it fills the side scenes which are far more interesting than the centre of the stage. In *Henry V* it partly reaches the centre, even mounting the throne itself. And that is the end of Shakespeare's History of England. For *Henry VIII* is of late and doubtful authorship, partly a reversion to the Chronicle and still more an anticipation of the Masque. It has as little plot as *Henry VI*, and only rises above these earliest Histories in its finer poetry and in the two great characters and the three or four great scenes in which alone it reaches the level of drama.

But to return to *Henry V*. Not so great a play because not so broadly human as *Henry IV*, it is the culmination and glory of the Histories as history. It is written almost throughout by that 'Muse of fire' to whom its very first line makes appeal. In it the trumpet of the national spirit sounds its loudest and most heroic blast. All the pride of England is in it and all the valour, concentrated in the most incredible of English victories and in the English king who united in himself, as only one or two men in the history of the world, those qualities of youth and victory and early death which make heroic legends. It is nothing to Shakespeare that the war of Agincourt was unjustifiable, purposeless, useless, and even disastrous in its ultimate results. The philosophy of history in this sense is no concern of his. Men are blind creatures, knowing little what they do or why they do it. Shakespeare's business is to show them doing it with an intensity and power of which they themselves are unaware. No Englishman, except such a withered

rationalist, if such there be, as cannot care for Hector or Achilles, will ever read *Henry V* without his pulse beating faster. And even an alliance with France will not keep most of us from sympathizing with Johnson at Versailles, 'No, no, we will try to act Harry the Fifth.'

Harry the Fifth! It has been reserved for self-blinded eyes in our own day to discover that the most heroic figure in Shakespeare's Histories was a dullard, a man of 'commonplace vices', in whose creation he could have taken little pleasure. If that were so, it would be difficult to explain why he made him the second figure in two plays and the first in a third. The truth is, of course, that he is for Shakespeare the hero king of all the line, as well as, perhaps, the most subtly studied human being of them all, quite as human as heroic. Richard III is a purely active figure, all energy of will and intellect, passionless, unfeeling, soulless, a human devil of the Italian Renascence type. Richard II is merely passive: he feels, imagines, enjoys, suffers, and, after his fashion, even loves; but he has neither the strength of will nor the clearness of intellect needed for action. Henry V can enjoy as well as act, can feel as well as think, can keep a conscience as well as an intellect, passions as well as a will; can live the whole of life without becoming either devil or weakling.

This richness of being has its drawbacks. Most of Shakespeare's readers have been of two minds about Henry. They find it hard to reconcile the hero with the haunter of taverns, the model of soldiers, sons, brothers and kings with the apparently faithless friend. They are conscious of a lump in the throat when they read 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends', and 'We few, we happy few, we band of brothers', and if they are Wordsworthians they inevitably say:

> This is the happy warrior; this is he
> Whom every man at arms should wish to be;

and then, when next they turn back to *Henry IV*, they are confused and disconcerted by the dismissal of Falstaff.

Shakespeare is never a careful writer, and probably, in this case as in others, he has left inconsistencies which can never be entirely explained away. But a careful reader who listens attentively to all that Shakespeare tells him will not, in this case, find many knots still tangled at the end. The central mistake about Henry is to suppose that he ever was a mere boon companion of Falstaff and his company, their equal and their like. Against this misconstruction Shakespeare has in fact taken some pains to warn us. It is quite true that the prince is constantly seen in company in which it is not fit that a prince should be seen, and that his language and conduct are sometimes, though not often, unedifying. This is proved both by what we ourselves see and by what the king says to him.

> Thy place in council thou hast rudely lost,
> Which by thy younger brother is supplied,
> And art almost an alien to the hearts
> Of all the court and princes of my blood :
> The hope and expectation of thy time
> Is ruin'd, and the soul of every man
> Prophetically doth forethink thy fall.

But the king has hardly uttered these words before he has his eyes opened to his son's true character, though he again goes blind to it later on, just as readers of the play tend to do. Free and open natures like Henry's, conscious of their own greatness and indifferent to opinion, are peculiarly liable to these misunderstandings. And Shakespeare has so lavished his powers on Falstaff that he carries away all hearts and colours all impressions whenever he is on the stage. He is perhaps the only one of all Shakespeare's creations to get the bit between his teeth and run away with his creator. The poet's delight in him allows him occasionally and partially to defeat the plain intention shown in all three plays that we should love and honour

the prince. But Shakespeare has really provided us with a good many warnings. He has given us the soliloquy at the end of the very first Act, as if to show us at once without a doubt how he conceived the character;

> I know you all and will a while uphold
> The unyoked humour of your idleness :

and later on he shows the Prince making the promise to himself which he would not make to the world :

> So, when this loose behaviour I throw off
> And pay the debt I never promised,
> By how much better than my word I am,
> By so much shall I falsify men's hopes.

This speech has often been attacked as proving the essential meanness of Henry's character. But why ? It is true that, besides a consciousness, too evident for our modern taste, of his princely quality, a matter which I will discuss presently, there is in his words rather too much self-confidence in his own virtue and in the safety with which he can run risks which would be fatal to weaker men. Self-assertion can hardly ever be a gracious thing and least of all when it has in it a touch of self-righteousness, as it has here. But it is only a touch. And, after all, self-confidence is a fault which any brave man, from Roman days to our own, would admit to lean to virtue's side. What we hear in the speech is the will of a strong man who means to shape his own course and character and not have them shaped for him either by his companions or by circumstances. What is the harm of his thinking this or saying it, especially as he says it only to himself ? Suppose a young man of our own day, one whose spirits were fuller grown than his wisdom, thrown by circumstances or by choice, by the love of adventure or by the scorn, wise or unwise, of a merely cloistered virtue, into the society of a pack of amusing but worthless boon companions. It is not his wisdom that put him there, and he may easily learn

that lesson in a repentance that may come too late. But being there, with whatever good or bad excuse, why may he not say, if he be clear-eyed and strong-willed enough to say it: 'I know my friends are shaking their heads; they see I am playing the fool; and they think I am not capable of playing anything else. But they will one day find out their mistake. I don't mean all my days to be holidays spent among fools, however pleasant the holidays and however amusing the fools; and when I put on my working clothes and show the wiseacres what I really am and what I mean to be and do, they will give me all the more credit for their surprise'. What is the harm of that? But that is in substance what the prince says. And Johnson, who understood human nature so much better than most of Shakespeare's critics, makes the right comment on it. 'The speech', he says, 'is very artfully introduced to keep the Prince from appearing vile in the opinion of the audience; it prepares them for his future reformation; and, what is yet more valuable, exhibits a natural picture of a great mind offering excuses to itself, and palliating those follies which it can neither justify nor forsake.' But this speech, whatever be thought of it, is very far from being the only warning Shakespeare has given us against the mistake of confusing the prince with his boon companions. Whenever we watch him in Falstaff's company, we find him, in one way or another, marking his separation from it. The first words he utters to Falstaff are words of reproach and disgust, and his tone throughout the scene is one of mingled affection, amusement, and contempt, in which the contempt is certainly not the least conspicuous of the three. It is true that Falstaff carries all off victoriously by his intellect and charm and by the music of his speech, and always gets the last word.

Falstaff. Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will

give it over : by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain : I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

Prince. Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack ?

Falstaff. Zounds, where thou wilt, lad ; I'll make one ; an I do not, call me villain and baffle me.

Prince. I see a good amendment of life in thee ; from praying to purse-taking.

Falstaff. Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal : 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation.

And it is true that it is nearly always Falstaff whom one loves to listen to and quote. But that is not the present point. What is the point is that here as elsewhere, from first to last, the prince maintains the ascendancy over Falstaff, not only of his birth, though of that he is plainly very conscious, but of his will and character. In this very matter of the robbery he is an outsider, an amateur, a patron. He at first scornfully refuses to have anything to do with it, is only persuaded to it by Poins as a practical joke on Falstaff, only robs his friends the thieves, and ultimately, after even lying to the sheriff in protection of Falstaff, pays the original victims back their money. So in the scene of the exposure of Falstaff. There indeed he is victorious all through, and rides rough-shod over the old rascal with all the weapons of argument, wit, Billingsgate, and the truth. For once he even gets the last word : 'I lack some of thy instinct' ; and so turns the tables on Falstaff that he reduces him to crying 'Ah, no more of that, Hal, an thou lovest me !' This distinction between Henry and his companions of the Boar's Head is really present all through. Observe, for instance, that he has to ask who Doll Tearsheet is. There is, indeed, one side of this distinction which he makes too plain for our modern democratic tastes. For he is very apt to play the prince to them all ; letting them know that he is not as they are. Even to his friend Poins his language is what we should call insolent and snobbish. But we must borrow Shakespeare's Elizabethan ears to judge him fairly. For Shakespeare, as for all men of that

day, it would not only be pardonable, it would be desirable, that a prince, or indeed a noble, should not demean himself too freely to ordinary men, or allow them to play at equality with him. No one ever understood the real equality of men better than Shakespeare, and none of his characters practise it better than Henry V, as we see him talking to the common soldiers, making love to Catharine, laughing at his own plain features, desiring that poor creature small beer. But no one more entered into the then at least equally real inequality of men ; accepted it, used it, valued, and praised it. *Henry V* gives us, in its very first act, one of Shakespeare's many panegyrics of order and obedience, of the divinity and hierarchy of human functions. And no one who has read *Henry VI*, *Troilus and Cressida*, or *Coriolanus*, to say nothing of other plays, will have much doubt that Shakespeare was as clear as St. Paul, not only about the animal and spiritual equality of men, but also about their social and political inequality. St. Paul says that in Christ 'there is neither bond nor free'. The souls of men, that is, men as they are in themselves, independent of temporal accidents, are of equal value in the sight of God and of men who try to judge with the judgement of God. But that is not, in St. Paul's view, any necessary condemnation of social inequality. Throughout his epistles he accepts the institution of slavery as one of the social and political facts of his time with which he did not directly concern himself. His business was not at all to revolutionize the Roman Empire or to destroy slavery ; it was to teach Christians how to use both for the glory of God. Still less was it Shakespeare's business to deal in political revolution. The tremendous speeches of Lear would be enough, even if they stood alone, to prove that he was at least as conscious as St. Paul of the essential unreality of the distinctions which separate a king from a beggar ; and apparently much more conscious of the practical injustices which result from inequality. Assuredly

he was no blind Conservative, indifferent to the wrongs and sufferings of the poor. But, on the whole, his prescription appears to be much like St. Paul's. It is not a change of social and political institutions which interests him ; it is rather an awakening of the imagination, a quickening of the heart. Of course it is always to be remembered that he is a dramatist and that the path leading through his creations to himself is one of very slippery walking. And certainly the circumstances in which he wrote his plays scarcely allowed of political speculations of a radical kind, even if he had felt any inclination for them. But that he felt such inclination few of his readers will, I think, be disposed to believe. His handling of human nature never seems to suggest any belief either in the ancient view, revived by modern Socialists, that Church and State can make men good by suitable institutions, commands, and prohibitions ; nor yet in that other view, dating from Rousseau and beloved of Shelley, that all men would be good if Church and State would but let them alone. The middling wisdom of a practical man like Shakespeare, with his eyes open to a living world, was not likely to believe the State to be all-powerful either for good or evil. Least of all would such a poet as he, loving the freedom of the human spirit as all poets must, care about any such machine-made virtues as external compulsion might produce. What he paints with most affection apparently is the moral and emotional beauty of women, the honesty, justice, and good sense of men. No doubt Cleopatra and Lady Macbeth interested his mind and aroused his powers at least as much as Helena, Miranda, or Desdemona ; and Hamlet and Lear much more than Horatio, the Bastard, or Henry V. But his sympathies are another thing. They are concentrated on the divine tenderness of women, and the sense and manliness of men. That is where he seems to find the salvation of the world ; certainly not in any political or social machinery. And as

human life needs a framework of some sort, and yet, in his view, as it seems, it matters little of what sort, he is content, like St. Paul, to accept for it the framework which he finds established, and to throw again and again any indirect influence which he may possess on the side of law and order, rank and hierarchy, and even, when occasion serves, to ridicule the pretensions of the proletariat and the crude suggestions for a new world which its ignorance and envy put forward. It was not his business to preach, as it was St. Paul's. But if it had been, and he had preached on these subjects, one can imagine his paralleling St. Paul's 'not circumcision nor uncircumcision but a new creature' with some Tennysonian 'not monarchy nor aristocracy nor democracy, but kind hearts and cool heads'. It is not the institutions which want changing but the character both of the rulers and the ruled.

All this is a long digression from the character of Henry V from which it began. But no play and no character exhibit better than *Henry V* this double attitude of Shakespeare's. It is his most monarchical play and Henry the most royal, masterful, and victorious of his kings. Yet no king is such a plain man, so entirely at home with plain men, indeed with all sorts of men and on all sorts of occasions. Whether he is leading an army or robbing on the highway, insulting a judge or crowning him with honour, doing brave deeds or playing practical jokes, saying wise words or witty, we always feel the man to be more than either the king, the madcap, or the soldier. Each of the parts he plays is played with the gusto of assured success; but each is only one out of the many, only the fragment of a whole. It is not without warrant that he once said of himself, 'I am now of all humours that have showed themselves humours since the old days of goodman Adam to the pupil age of this present twelve o'clock at midnight'. Of some indeed that are not common either on the battle-field, in the council chamber, or

in the tavern. For instance, he is, except his son, by far the most religious of Shakespeare's kings. No one in all the plays refers his conduct and his fate so constantly, and apparently so sincerely, to God. It is he who makes the great answer in the moment of danger : ' We are in God's hand, brother, not in theirs.' It is into his lips that Shakespeare puts the great saying, so much greater than its occasion, ' there is some soul of goodness in things evil '. It is he who, when talking among the soldiers as one of them, makes one of the few definitely orthodox and theological speeches in Shakespeare :

> ' Every subject's duty is the king's ; but every subject's soul is his own. Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every man in his bed, wash every mote out of his conscience ; and, dying so, death is to him advantage ; or not dying, the time was blessedly lost wherein such preparation was gained : and in him that escapes, it were not sin to think that, making God so free an offer, He let him outlive that day to see His greatness and to teach others how they should prepare.'

And, finally, it is he who, after his amazing victory, repeatedly and, so far as can be judged, with sincere piety, refuses the glory of it :

> O God, thy arm was here ;
> And not to us, but to thy arm alone,
> Ascribe we all !

This simple and apparently genuine religious language may be part of the directness and simplicity of his mind. His character is subtly conceived in that it embraces such a variety in its unity. But his mind is the mind of a hero, not at all of a poet or a philosopher or an intellectual genius. Poor Richard II has more of that in him. But perhaps Shakespeare, like many men of original genius, having so much of that in himself, did not find it the thing he cared most about in other men, and preferred that his hero should be a man of plain thoughts and plain speech. Not that

Henry is a fool; far from it. We have seen him defeat Falstaff, and he does it more than once; saying of him and to him things as good as his own. There is intellectual as well as moral victory in 'even such kin as the parish heifers are to the town bull'. And it is superior brains more than superior rank which tells Poins: 'thou art a blessed fellow to think as every man thinks: never a man's thought in the world keeps the roadway better than thine'. And, perhaps there is something of an even higher order in those other words to Poins: 'Well, thus we play the fools with the time: and the spirits of the wise sit in the clouds and mock us.' But in the main he is compounded of plain man, honest man, and hero, with but little of curious thought or imagination in him. The hero needs no insisting on. No one in all Shakespeare's world strikes the authentic note of soldier and hero as he strikes it, from the defiance of the Dauphin and his tennis balls, through the appeal to the 'good yeomen Whose limbs were made in England':—

> let us swear
> That you are worth your breeding: which I doubt not;
> For there is none of you so mean and base,
> That hath not noble lustre in your eyes;—

to the glorious

> What 's he that wishes so?
> My cousin Westmoreland? No, my fair cousin:
> If we are marked to die, we are enow
> To do our country loss: and, if to live,
> The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
> God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
> By Jove, I am not covetous for gold,
> Nor care I who doth feed upon my cost:
> It yearns me not if men my garments wear;
> Such outward things dwell not in my desires;
> But if it be a sin to covet honour,
> I am the most offending soul alive.

There can be few words in all English literature that came so often as these into the memories of Englishmen going after forlorn hopes on dark nights in France or Flanders or

Gallipoli, during the Great War in which so many deeds were done as incredible as those of Agincourt and so many obscure heroes felt and thought what only Henry, with Shakespeare's help, was able to say.

But Shakespeare has been at pains to keep him from being all hero and king and nothing else, a figure such as for most men could only seem a gilded piece on a tapestry. No one knows better than Henry that a king is a man and that

> 'Tis not the balm, the sceptre, and the ball,
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The throne he sits on, nor the tide of pomp
> That beats upon the high shore of this world

that can deliver him from the common incidents of human life. He is always a thing of flesh and blood, one that can be ' exceeding weary ', with an appetite so far from ' princely got ' that it leaves him a prey to the mortal weakness of remembering small beer when he is thirsty ; one that by Falstaff's testimony has ' husbanded and tilled ' his inherited cold blood ' with excellent endeavour of drinking good and good store of fertile sherris ' ; a ' fellow of plain and uncoined constancy ', as he himself says in his unkingly but most English wooing, ' whose face is not worth sunburning, that never looks in his glass for love of anything he sees there '. Has the Frenchman yet been born who could say such a thing ? Henry is the sort of man, with no fashions or poses about him, to whom people say such things as ' Would 'twere bed time, Hal, and all well ', and ' I believe, as cold a night as 'tis, he could wish himself in Thames up to the neck : and so I would he were, and I by him, at all adventures, so we were quit here ' ; to whom men can make fearless defences ; ' what your highness suffered under that shape I beseech you to take it for your own fault, not mine '. Is not this why we English at any rate find him so typically English ? The French think of themselves as

original in mind and generous in heart. We think of ourselves as intellectually sane and morally straight. In our eyes Englishmen are men who make no pictures about themselves and are apt to perform more than they promise; whose humour is a constant ironical understatement of their own hopes and achievements; who laugh at their enemy ten times for once they hate him. Many a French soldier in the war must have said in his heart the French counterpart of 'Would I were in an alehouse in London! I would give all my fame for a pot of ale and safety'. But only an Englishman would say it with his tongue and in the ears of his neighbours. Henry's men, like our modern English soldiers, make no pretence of liking fighting; and probably, like our men, they would have been very slow in learning to hate the Germans. There is a story of two generals, a French and an English, riding together, and the Frenchman commenting on the apparent lack of emotion and enthusiasm of the English soldiers as shown, for instance, in the fact that they seldom sang on the march. As he said it an English regiment came up and passed by them. The men were singing loudly. The French general apologized for what he had said. 'Do you know what they were singing?' said the Englishman; 'The Hymn of Hate.' One can quite fancy Bates and Williams in that regiment, with the Bastard for their colonel; and Harry, though he keeps his humour rather in the background after he is king, as their fit and natural commander-in-chief. And we love him accordingly as, in addition to all the rest, the truest of Englishmen.

And yet, it will be naturally objected, this plain man, honest man, Englishman, hero, is the Henry who kills his prisoners and casts off his old friend when he comes to the throne. Both are, at first sight, ugly incidents: that may be admitted. And indeed there is worse. For the horrible speech before Harfleur, though its threats of all that 'the

blind and bloody soldier with foul hand ' can and shall do to old men and infants, fathers and daughters, happily remain only threats, is to our ears among the ugliest which Shakespeare ever put into any mouth. But about that there are two things to be said. One is the old historical defence : words and deeds were then possible to knightly men, the story of which now only serves to show us how far we have travelled on the road of humanity. The other is that the speech may be attacked as one of Shakespeare's strange inconsistencies ; for, at the king's very next appearance, his language and conduct are as great a contrast to those of this scene as Wellington's were to Blucher's. He will have no abuses or insults addressed to the country people, and he will have them paid for all they supply, ' for when lenity and cruelty play for a kingdom, the gentler gamester is the soonest winner '. As to the business of the prisoners there is a still surer explanation. Fluellen is the soul of honour and he says it was the punishment of treachery, and Gower expressly praises the king for the order. And Henry is so strongly moved before giving it that he says, ' I was not angry since I came to France Until this instant '. War is necessarily an ugly business, even to-day, and in to-day's humanest armies : it could not then be a beautiful one.

There remains the last and heaviest count in the indictment. The French prisoners and the people of Harfleur are shadows to us, and we do not easily care very greatly about their fate. But Falstaff is no shadow, in any sense. We love him and hate to see him dismissed and discomfited. Indeed some of us who have an especial turn for intellectual pleasure are so carried away captive by his wit that we will not even see him for what he is, will not allow that he was either liar or coward ; blinding our eyes not only to the plain facts as set out in the play, and to the impression always made by them, certainly not without Shakespeare's

intention, on all audiences and readers, but also to the obvious consideration that half the humour which wins our hearts would be gone if he were a brave man and a truth-teller. Where would be the humour of 'a plague of all cowards' if the speaker were not what every theatre takes him for? Where would be the fun of the 'plain tale' that puts his preposterous boastings down if, as we are told, he never meant to be believed? No; these are the aberrations of the intellectual. And when one of these intellectuals, the greatest of living students of Shakespeare, Mr. A. C. Bradley, indulges in these fancies, we need not take them too seriously except as providing sovereign and final proof of the supreme fascination of Falstaff.

It is just that fascination, of course, which makes the difficulty of the final scene between Henry and Falstaff. We resent the sermon and the sending to the Fleet; we find it hard not to resent even the mere rejection itself. And yet Shakespeare has done all he can to prepare us: all except, as Mr. Bradley finely argues, the one thing needful, which was to deprive him of his humour. He has separated Falstaff and the Prince more and more; they only meet once in the Second Part before the rejection; and on that one occasion Falstaff is seen in the lowest degradation. All through the play he and his tavern world are drawn nearer to the disgusting, further from the triumphant and amusing, while the Prince is always revealing more and more of his higher and truer self. It is notable that while the first thing he does as king is to honour and promote the Chief Justice who had fearlessly punished his follies as prince, the first thing Falstaff does on knowing of the accession is to cry 'let us take any man's horses: the laws of England are at my commandment. Blessed are they that have been my friends; and woe to my lord chief justice.' Between such a Henry and such a Falstaff there could be no further companionship.

But need there have been so insulting a dismissal? That is the question. To answer it we have to look not only at Falstaff's general character but at the abominable behaviour which actually provokes the rejection. The coronation, then as now, was the most solemn and ceremonious moment in a king's life. It was this moment which Falstaff chose to break in upon the procession with his impudent familiarities—'God save thee my sweet boy', 'my Jove', and the rest. Can we blame the king for his stern rebuke, though we may wish it had been briefer? What would a judge do who should find himself shouted at with old mess or club jokes when he first took his seat on the bench? This is as much worse as a king is greater than a judge. Even to-day, kings, and kings who are no longer personal rulers, show themselves at once conscious of the sharp line which separates them from their past directly they have stepped across the threshold of the throne. It is said that an old friend of King Edward VII, addressing him within a few hours of his accession by a nickname which had been frequently used among his intimates, received in reply a look which did not indeed send him to the Fleet, or even extinguish the friendship, but which silenced the nickname once and for all. Henry V was a greater king and his dignity was assailed not in private but in public, and needed the severer rebuke.

Beyond that, the absolutely needful, the king does not appear to have gone. If Falstaff was actually taken to the Fleet, he evidently did not stay there; we soon find him among his friends again, though it is true we find him dying. His habits, poor man, cannot have made him a good subject for a 'tertian fever', and we need not perhaps take Mrs. Quickly's diagnosis of a broken heart too seriously. He had been provided for, 'very well provided for', as Prince John and the King both tell us; and is not likely to have been very unhappy so long as he could command

an ever-flowing stream of sack. Shakespeare at least has no doubt of the king having done right, and puts a humorous defence of his conduct into the mouth of that honest Welsh hero Fluellen ; Henry is a greater man than Alexander, for Alexander got drunk and killed his best friend ; Henry kept sober and turned away his worst friend whose very name Fluellen has forgotten and takes no note of when he is told it.

But we are not like Fluellen in that respect. Fluellen had not had our advantage or disadvantage of seeing Falstaff through the magnifying glasses of Shakespeare's genius. We cannot but be hurt in Falstaff's hurting. Our minds and consciences know him to be an old ruffian of whom the king is well rid ; but our hearts are more powerful than our consciences, and they owe him so much that we cannot even think that we are well rid of him. That is Shakespeare's fault. He did not mean us to condemn Henry, and we do not when we stop to think. But with Falstaff before us we are always too busy enjoying to have time for thinking. Shakespeare has for once over-reached himself. Falstaff grew under his creative hand till he became capable of that ' inexplicable touch of infinity '—the phrase is Mr. Bradley's —which we are to see again, in such different forms, in Hamlet and Lear and Cleopatra, but which we do not see in Henry V, for all his victorious strength and virtue. The poet had in fact ' created so extraordinary a being and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not '. And we must perforce follow him in his inconsistency. Let Falstaff stay king of our senses, and at least the weaker part of our hearts. But he must not deprive Henry of the loyal allegiance of their stronger part as well as of our judgements and consciences.

The three great plays in which Henry and Falstaff dominate the stage are the crown of Shakespeare's achievement in history. When he touches it again it is in a

perfunctory way, in conjunction with another man, and in a manner which is not his own. *Henry VIII* is as much a masque as a history. It lives by the two great figures—Wolsey the victim of ambition, Katharine the victim of policy, tyranny, and lust. The Reformation, which for us is the important event of the reign, is scarcely mentioned. So far as the play is Shakespeare's we may say that Shakespeare remained to the end faithful to his royal and personal conception of history. He wrote his Histories at the end of the reign of the most popular of all English sovereigns, the last of our strongest royal house. When *Henry VIII* was added to the series the throne was already occupied by the first of the weak family who were to lose it and leave for their successors something slowly dwindling into the Hereditary Presidency of to-day. The old royal England ends with Elizabeth, the last sovereign to be worshipped and obeyed. The English people fought and defeated the Stuarts ; ignored and half despised the first Georges ; hated, respected, and then pitied George III ; used, reverenced, and loved, but neither feared nor in any very literal sense obeyed Queen Victoria. Shakespeare saw the great chapter of kingship as it closed ; and he gave to it his gift of life. As it came from his hands it is far from being all beauty, victory or wisdom ; quite the contrary ; it is mainly a record of crime and folly. But he has given it his indefinable touch of greatness ; and as we look back on his picture of it, we see our kings and ourselves as realities, living and sinning, plotting and fighting, suffering and dying ; and we see again and again, through and behind them all, the figure of England, slowly shaping herself for our rejoicing admiration, loyalty, and love.

PROMETHEUS IN POETRY

THE story of Prometheus is the subject of dramas by three of the very greatest poets of the world, as well as by several others of humbler rank. It has also given, not its name but things much more important than a name, to two of the greatest creations of Milton. His Satan and his Samson both bear very obvious marks of the influence of the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus. A subject which is in itself so sublime, and has been handled by such poets as Aeschylus and Milton, Goethe and Shelley, can hardly fail to provide matter of interest, both in the way of contrast and in the way of parallel, to those who occupy themselves with the study of poetry. Art is at once discipline and freedom, acceptance and revolt, law and life. There is no life for it outside law and none that is wholly within. Artists, like the rest of us, are at once the children of necessity and the children of free will: and, as neither principle by itself expresses life, so neither by itself expresses art. The poet receives a tradition, accepts and uses it, imposes himself upon it and varies it. The drama of Shakespeare is what it is both because he sat at Marlowe's feet and because he turned his back upon Marlowe. The *Faery Queen* could not have been without Ariosto, but still less could it have been without Spenser. The working of this double law of acceptance and innovation is nowhere better seen than where many artists or poets deal with the same subject. The hieratic stupidity of so much Egyptian art is due to the fact that generations of artists continue to repeat every detail of a scene, like seminarists taught to say the offices or perform ceremonial acts after their masters without using their own minds at all. For centuries the same king appears

on Egyptian reliefs in exactly the same attitude punishing the same prostrate enemies in the same way. The making of such reliefs had evidently become a mere form or ritual in which the only thing that mattered was to do the thing exactly as it had always been done. But mere ceremonial conservatism is perhaps an even surer way of death for art than anarchical freedom; partly because it is so much easier to practise. The rebel in the arts is always much more traditional than he supposes. He owes much more than he knows to his predecessors; he unconsciously reproduces them much more. Whitman fancied he owed nothing to anybody; fancied he could set and was setting all the laws and traditions of poetry at defiance. But he often falls back on more or less traditional forms; and it is with the assistance of these forms, and not in naked independence of them, that his genius achieved the sublime things by which it will live. But we need not travel so far as to Whitman for the contrast to Egyptian monotony. He, like Wordsworth, was deliberately attempting new poetic subjects: and for them a certain originality of manner was obvious and inevitable. The real contrast to Egypt is found in Greece or Italy: the same Centaurs and Lapiths, the same Apollos and Aphrodites, the same Nativities and Walks to Emmaus. How content the artists of Europe have been with the subjects given them by tradition! How obedient they have been, generation after generation! And yet how unhampered their freedom has been! What a free spiritual journey there is between the Apollo of Tenea and the Apollo Belvedere, between a Nativity by Raphael and one by Rembrandt, between the Supper at Emmaus as once conceived at Venice by Paul Veronese and now by Forain at Paris to-day! And of course the same counterworking of acceptance and divergence may be seen all through the history of poetry. Virgil writes an Epic obviously uniting the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer: like both and yet very unlike. Horace learns

what he has it in him to learn of Pindar, and Catullus of Sappho: each adds himself to his model. The Greek tragedians handle again and again the same legends, at once following and departing from the tale that had already been so often told. Shakespeare invents no plots, nor Molière: yet who ever had a freer genius, or gave it freer play, than, in their different ways, these two?

But to come back to Prometheus. There is nowhere any better example of what I have been saying. No poetic subject has had the consecration of so much genius. None has better exhibited the fertility and variety that may be found in a great ancient story. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' Abraham's question is the question asked in the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, in the *Prometheus* of Shelley, in the book of *Job*. It is the question again and again suggested in the *Paradise Lost*. But there it is mainly the reader who asks it. In the dramas it is asked by a great rebel. And in each of them it is the rebel, not the Judge, who is the hero of the drama. At the root of each of them, and of Goethe's drama too, is the sublime conception of the passage from slavery to freedom; of the spirit which refuses any longer to remain the unquestioning slave of the caprices of a tyrant and demands to obey no power but that which is the embodiment of law and justice, that whose service is perfect freedom and the fullness of life. Milton said that the object of his epic was to justify the ways of God to men. Whether he succeeds or not is not here the point. His poem throughout asks the question which Job asks of God, which the Prometheus of Aeschylus, Goethe, and Shelley asks of Zeus. Shakespeare asks something very like it through the mouth of Lear: 'I am a man more sinn'd against than sinning.' Lear feels the need of finding a way to 'show the heavens more just'. Still with him this is only a momentary vision of the universal: once or twice, in the tremendous lightning-flashes of that awful night, he

sees not himself but the whole world. But it is only for a moment. His antagonist in the drama is not Zeus or Jehovah: it is his daughters. But the war of Job and Prometheus and Satan is with none other than Omnipotence. Of all these poets the only one capable of supposing that Authority has absolutely nothing to say for itself is Shelley: though curiously enough Goethe, the man of order, is not far behind him. We do not know exactly how Aeschylus met the tremendous challenge which his Prometheus had thundered out. Probably in some fashion which would not seem satisfactory to us who have carried so much farther than he the demand for a rational and ethical theology. Shelley turned away with indignation from 'a catastrophe so feeble as a reconciliation between the champion and the oppressor of mankind'. But it was his characteristic weakness to make his Zeus the mere oppressor of mankind. The Zeus of Aeschylus is more than that. And the reconciliation of apparent opposites, so distasteful to abstract natures like Shelley's, is the law of life. It is at any rate certain that Aeschylus found some way of 'atonement' between his Rebel and his Omnipotent. For Milton's Rebel there could be no atonement. The interesting challenge in his poem is that of Adam, and still more that of the critical reader. And the answer they get is one of legalized tyranny tempered by love. The Divine omnipotence is partly an irresponsible Despot whose mere will must be accepted as law: partly a personified Love which gives Itself to transform the Despot into a Father, the subjects into children. Like the Prometheus of the ultimate solution, Adam submits and accepts. And so, no doubt, did the critical reader of Milton's day. And so does Job, though the answer he gets is little more than a naked reassertion of Divine Omnipotence and human weakness, the only answer Dante gives to the same question. That answer is of course ultimately one of faith, the faith that a universe which will not ultimately be ex-

plained as good is unbelievable and indeed inconceivable. Neither Jehovah nor Zeus is believable as God except so far as the inexplicable element in him is due not to a defect in his nature but to a defect in our capacity of understanding it. 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?' 'Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?'

But the business of art is not so much to answer the great questions of life as to make us intensely aware of their greatness. An answer that comes out of the whirlwind is, logically, no answer at all: it belongs to a world above that of logical answerings. It is the defect of Milton that he answers and argues too much. The purposes of poetry are better served by the overwhelming self-assertion of 'the Lord', or even by Shelley's formless and dreamlike vision of an ultimate universalism of love. Meanwhile alike in Aeschylus, in Shelley, and in the book of *Job*, the question occupies far more space than the answer. In Aeschylus, indeed, as he remains to us, it occupies the whole.

The *Prometheus Vinctus* is the easiest of his extant plays, and contains almost his finest and altogether his dullest work. It has more modern interest than any of his dramas except the *Agamemnon*, and has played a greater part in literary history than even that astonishing masterpiece. The most titanic of poets was the fit creator of the legend of the divine Rebel. Let us glance hastily at his plot. In the eyes of modern readers, of course, there hardly is one. And that is not merely because what we have is only one section of the Trilogy which was the whole drama. It is also because, while the genius of the theatre rose at once to its utmost heights in Aeschylus, its mechanisms of every kind are with him in their infancy. There is scarcely anything of what we should call action in the *Prometheus*. The hero remains throughout in the centre of the stage, where he is visited, like the Samson of Milton, by various persons whose visits make the play,

though only the first two of them do anything. After Hephaestus has once nailed him to his place of torture nothing happens. He makes a sublime appeal to Nature in his first speech, and another, after his great defiance, in his very last words: all the rest is his eternal challenge to the Tyrant, varied only by the different attitudes of his visitors and by the long episode of Io. The interest of the drama is spectacular and above all lyrical: it is a spiritual act, not, like the best drama to-day, an intellectual game. It begins quietly, as most great dramas do, a minor personage being the speaker, as in the great tragedies of Shakespeare. The business of telling the spectators where they are and what the action of the play is to be has scarcely ever been more naturally accomplished than it is by the opening words of Kratos. There could not be a greater contrast to this concrete and businesslike introduction than the long speech with which Shelley makes Prometheus open his play, one of glorious eloquence but enough of itself to make the drama impossible to perform and difficult to read. The next seventy lines are devoted to the admirable scene between Kratos and Hephaestus, the bullying inspector and the reluctant, sympathetic, very human executioner. Then comes, at line 88, the beautiful appeal of Prometheus to Nature: ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ, O divine air and swift-winged breezes: so exactly like Shelley in spirit, so unlike him in its brevity and definiteness. Prometheus has not spoken while the executioners are present and when he speaks he does not mention them. Then, at line 115, comes a very Shelleyan line (τίς ἀχώ, τίς ὀδμὰ προσέπτα μ' ἀφεγγὴς;) which, however, finds perhaps its nearest English rendering in Arnold's

> What sweet-breathing presence
> Out-perfumes the thyme,
> What voices enrapture
> The night's balmy prime?

With it Prometheus notes the coming of the Chorus. They are the daughters of Ocean, and they travel by air, as so many of Shelley's people do. The scene which follows is occupied with the hero's lamentations and the answering sympathy of the Chorus. Even the Nymphs hint that Zeus may yet suffer the loss of his ill-used sovereignty. But they end on the other note, that of the dangers of defiance. Prometheus then proceeds at their request to tell them his story, which fills them with horror so that they beg him to seek some way of escape. But he proudly replies that all that he had done he had done with his eyes open: and he gives no hint of wishing it undone. A great actor could make a great effect with the concentrated force of his ἑκὼν ἑκὼν ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι ('Of my own will and choice I sinned: I shall never deny it'). He then offers to tell them more if they will descend from their airy car. As they do so their father Ocean arrives, riding on a winged monster. He brings a fresh touch of dramatic effect. To the honest peasant-like sympathy of Hephaestus and the maidenly tenderness of the Nymphs he adds the timid, prudent, formal consolations of a rich relation who feels bound to make an appearance of doing something but has no intention of incurring risk or loss. He reminds us at times of the friends of Job advising humility and submission. But Prometheus declines his offers of intercession with polite contempt, and on his departure, after the Chorus have sung an ode echoing the sympathy which Prometheus had just expressed for his brother rebels Atlas and Typhoeus, Prometheus recounts to them all that he had done for men, ending with the proud boast: 'in one word, it is to Prometheus that men owe all their arts.' They think that if he is so clever he should set his mind to delivering himself. But he replies that his deliverance will not come in that way: for Art (or Ingenuity) is far weaker than Necessity. Fate, he darkly hints, is stronger than Zeus: but how it will work is his

secret in which lies his hope of escape. We shall see that this notion of the supremacy of Fate even over Zeus is important both for Goethe and for Shelley. After this comes a lovely and typically Greek chorus in which the Nymphs pray for strength to keep the way of piety and bid Prometheus consider the utter weakness of men. 'What help is in the creatures of a day? The counsels of men will never override the harmony of Zeus.' It is again the burden of the friends of Job: only that the ideal Zeus of the Greek Chorus is rather a perfect harmony of order than the law or will which is the notion of Jehovah. And the reminiscence of the far away happiness, the feasts and songs, of the marriage of Prometheus, in which the Nymphs had taken their part, is very Greek too.

At line 572 Io enters and occupies the stage for 300 lines. She is for us the least interesting person of the drama. But the Greeks were immensely interested in their old legends: her partly animal form must have been a popular feature: the insoluble geography of her wanderings, so tedious to us, delighted a society just beginning to be interested in travel, for which it had the fascination which the savage and monstrous seems always to have for very civilized and city-inhabiting populations; and she is concerned in the plot to the extent of being both another victim of Zeus, whose love had been her ruin, and the ancestress of Heracles who is to deliver Prometheus. The long speeches which she and Prometheus exchange need not detain us, except as to one point. Her questions lead to what seems to me an undramatic touch in Prometheus's definite assertion of the future fall of Zeus. The prophecies of a hero prophet in a drama should surely come true. But we know that Zeus did not after all make the fatal marriage and did not fall. And the undramatic effect of the passage is hardly relieved by the admission, a few lines later, that Zeus may escape if Prometheus be released, or by the

prophecy that one of Io's descendants shall in fact be his deliverer. The two assertions are not really reconciled : the first is quite definite and is contradicted by the second. Moreover, after another characteristically Greek chorus praying for equal marriage and deliverance from such high loves as had proved the ruin of Io, Prometheus repeats his threat of the fall of Zeus in a speech of splendid passion and directness, the kind of speech which every one can understand and which Shelley could not write. His defiant mood, in which he definitely asserts that the rule of Zeus will not last long, even leads him into taunting the gentle Chorus as if they were flatterers of the tyrant. Prometheus has in fact reached a stage of angry bitterness which stops at nothing : a stage which of course the much more spiritual creation of Shelley never reaches.

The final scene follows. Hermes, the lackey of Zeus, as Prometheus contemptuously calls him, comes to demand the secret of his master's prophesied fall. The passage at arms between the insolence of the royal servant and the utter scorn and defiance which Prometheus angrily hurls at both servant and master makes one of those scenes in which tragedy exhibits a cleverness of scolding which brings it dangerously near the verge of comedy. Yet even in the presence of Hermes the tortured hero lets fall a word of self-pity : a word which Hermes at once catches up as unknown to Zeus. ' But it shall be known,' replies Prometheus.

Once more, to Hermes, he pronounces that strange prophecy of the fall of Zeus. As Uranus and Kronus fell, so he, the third ruler of heaven, shall also fall, with a ruin swift and ignominious (*αἴσχιστα καὶ τάχιστα*). Then, utterly refusing any sort of concession, and heaping insult upon insult, he bids Zeus do his worst, undeterred by all that Hermes tells him of the awful penalties with which his disobedience will at once be visited. Hermes departs, after inviting the Nymphs to leave Prometheus lest they should

be involved in his ruin, an invitation which they indignantly refuse. Then Prometheus utters the last words of the drama, as the earthquake, thunder and lightning begin the fulfilment of the threats of Hermes. The whole world of earth and air and sea is in wild commotion as he appeals, like Lear, to the heavens against the injustice of his fate.

Has any tragedy in the world a catastrophe so stupendous? And this sublime conclusion is in one way curiously modern. Almost invariably in Greek plays the tension is relaxed before the end and the last words are words of acceptance and quiet. So, in Milton's Greek drama, the 'universal groan As if the whole inhabitation perished', which marks the catastrophe of Samson and his enemies, is almost forgotten in the final choric song which begins

> All is best, though we oft doubt
> What the unsearchable dispose
> Of highest wisdom brings about
> And ever best found in the close;—

and ends with the dismissal of the surviving personages of the drama (and, we may add, of the spectators or readers), with 'peace and consolation', and, last word of all,

> With calm of mind all passion spent.

How utterly unlike the end of the *Prometheus*! We must, however, remember again that the play was part of a Trilogy and that its defiant last word was not the last word of the dramatist. That came after the reconciliation, the idea of which was so intolerable to Shelley.

Of Shelley's much longer drama a shorter analysis will suffice. The plot of the *Prometheus Vinctus* is unimportant compared, for instance, with that of the *Oedipus* of Sophocles: but it is all-important compared with that of Shelley's play. Incomparably rich as is the *Prometheus Unbound* in spiritual and intellectual content, it has in fact scarcely any plot. It is true that it would appear at first sight to have

more than the *Prometheus Vinctus*. For its scene changes from mountain to valley, from Hell to Heaven: and it shows Demogorgon rising, Jupiter falling, Prometheus delivered. But none of these events is made dramatically effective: and in truth the drama has little or no dramatic action. For while dramatic action is that of beings accepted as real and as moving in a real world, in Shelley's drama one person seems to fade into another, neither person nor place nor plot has any clear form or figure, and everything seems to have the shadowy inconsequence of a beautiful dream.

The opening scene shows Prometheus chained on the rock, with the Ocean Nymphs, Panthea and Ione, sitting at his feet. After the magnificent declamation to which I have already alluded, Prometheus asks the spirits of the mountains and the air to repeat the curse in which he had denounced Jupiter. They dare not: and Earth his mother, who describes the misery of all her lands and peoples since the ruin of Prometheus, dare not either. It can only be told by the inhabitants of the underworld, who are the shadows of all that live in Earth or Heaven. Prometheus then calls on the Phantasm of Jupiter himself to repeat the curse. The Phantasm does so, strangely denouncing himself in the words of Prometheus: the curse is a curse of remorse

> Till thine Infinity shall be
> A robe of envenomed agony;
> And thine Omnipotence a crown of pain,
> To cling like burning gold round thy dissolving brain.

On hearing it, Prometheus—at once showing his utter unlikeness to the Prometheus of Aeschylus—repents his curse—

> Grief for awhile is blind, and so was mine.
> I wish no living thing to suffer pain.

The Earth breaks out into grief at this, regarding it as proof that Prometheus has surrendered and Jupiter has been victorious. At this moment Mercury enters, as in Aeschylus, to demand the secret on Jupiter's behalf and advise

submission. But, unlike the Hermes of Aeschylus, he is full of pity and hates himself for his message and his threats. The answer of Prometheus is, as in Aeschylus, a defiance. When told that perhaps the mind may not be able even to number the years which he will have to spend in torture, he makes the sublime answer :

Perchance no thought can count them—yet they pass.

The Furies then come to do their work in the course of which they often betray the voice of Shelley breaking in, very undramatically, with a sympathetic note, on what ought to be their joy in the sufferings of the world, which they relate to him as being, if I understand Shelley rightly, a crueller pain to Prometheus than any personal tortures inflicted on himself could be. They especially enlarge on the miseries wrought in the world in the name of one whom they show as 'a youth With patient looks nailed to a crucifix'. The Furies depart, and the Nymphs call up the spirits 'whose homes are the dim caves of human thought' to comfort Prometheus, which they do in visions of the work among men of wisdom, poetry and love. Prometheus declares that he feels 'most vain all hope but love': and wishes either to be

The saviour and the strength of suffering man,
Or sink into the original gulf of things ;

and Panthea leaves him in order to visit his beloved Asia who has been 'in exile' in India ever since the fall of Prometheus.

The second Act opens in the Indian Caucasus where Panthea comes to Asia. She recounts to Asia a dream of Prometheus delivered and appearing in glorious beauty : and then another vision appears which calls 'follow, follow'. This vision or dream has also been dreamed by Asia. Echoes are then heard singing 'follow' : Asia is told by them that

In the world unknown
Sleeps a voice unspoken ;
By thy step alone
Can its rest be broken ;

and the two sisters follow the voices.

The second Scene shows the sisters passing into a Forest and Spirits singing lyrics of its beauty and mystery in which Shelley's purely poetic genius is shown almost at its highest. Fauns listen, and, almost in the language of Milton's *Comus*, ask

> Canst thou imagine where those spirits live
> Which make such delicate music in the woods ?

The third Scene shows Asia and Panthea on a Pinnacle of Rock, the portal or chasm of the realm of Demogorgon, to which they have been led by the voice which called them. They speak of the beauty of the scene on which they look down : spirits call them ' down, down ' in another lovely song : by Asia alone can ' the snake-like Doom ' coiled under the throne of the Immortal be unloosed.

Scene IV shows them descended to the Cave of Demogorgon who is ' a mighty darkness ' from which ' rays of gloom issue ' like light from the sun. He offers to answer their questions : and tells them that ' God, merciful God ' made the living world and all its good of thought and imagination and love : but of pain and hell he does not name the creator, only answering ' He reigns '. This negative answer he three times repeats : on which Asia gives a history of the world, as it were ; the reign of Heaven and Earth, and then of Saturn, on whose refusal of knowledge and self-empire to man Prometheus gave wisdom to Jupiter ' with this law alone, " Let man be free " '. Jove was faithless but Prometheus gave man hope and fire and all the arts, and love : and for this he hangs withering in pain. Man is now outcast and abandoned : Prometheus shall again deliver him ; but when ? To that question the answer of Demogorgon is ' Behold ', and immediately Asia sees the Hours appear as ' wild-eyed charioteers ', in ' cars drawn by rainbow-wingèd steeds ' ; one of these carries away Demogorgon and another Asia and Panthea. Scene V. shows them in the car within a cloud, Asia transformed into such beauty that Panthea can

scarcely endure its radiance. A voice in the air sings to Asia the wonderful lyric 'Life of life! thy lips enkindle' and Asia replies in another lyrical vision of a diviner day.

The third Act begins with a brief scene of the fall of Jupiter. He is seated on his throne and addresses the 'congregated powers of Heaven' in a speech of triumph, the note of which is

Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.

He is awaiting the 'incarnation', 'the dreadful might of ever-living limbs' which is to ascend from Demogorgon's throne and clothe the 'fatal child' which has resulted from his union with Thetis. It is as yet an unbodied spirit in heaven, 'felt although unbeheld': but when it has received its destined form it will descend to earth and trample out every spark of the soul of man. But it is Demogorgon himself who arrives, and summons Jupiter to descend with him to the abyss, there to dwell 'henceforth in darkness'. The personal side of the myth is here extremely obscure, as Demogorgon declares himself to be Eternity and at the same time the child of Jupiter which, as Jupiter has told us, he has 'even now begotten'. But even of Greek myths it is commonly difficult enough to make a consistent story: of Shelley's it is always impossible. Their logic, like that of his similes, dissolves in dream. Nor are we much concerned with the fatal child. After a vain resistance, and a very Shelleyan wish that Prometheus could be his judge, Jupiter submits and falls. Scene II shows Ocean and Apollo rejoicing in his fall and in the future happiness of the world. In Scene III Hercules unbinds Prometheus who declares that he will henceforth live in a certain cave with Asia and Panthea and Ione in love and happiness and visited by all 'the echoes of the human world', love and art and poetry. Earth declares that she feels new life and joy through all her 'marble nerves' and summons a spirit to guide them to the destined cave. Scene IV shows them in the cave, with the

Spirit of Earth who addresses Asia as Mother and describes the changed earth; how all ugly and evil human shapes have, as he watched, 'past floating through the air', and 'those From whom they passed seemed mild and lovely forms After some foul disguise had fallen'; for 'All things had put their evil nature off'.

Then comes the Spirit of the Hour to relate the results which have followed from her breathing into a 'many-folded shell', as she had been bidden by Prometheus. The shell had been Asia's nuptial boon from Proteus: and the change which its sounding produces is that which has just been described by the Spirit of Earth. Tyranny and Superstition are destroyed, and man is left 'sceptreless, free, uncircumscribed'; 'exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king Over himself'; though not yet exempt 'from chance, and death, and mutability,' which if he were, he might oversoar 'the loftiest star of unascended heaven, Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.'

Act IV takes place near the cave of Prometheus. First the Hours and then human spirits sing the joy and beauty of the new order of things. Then Ione sees a chariot whose 'wheels are solid clouds' and within it a winged infant with a quivering moonbeam in its hand. Next Panthea sees a sphere solid as crystal, yet with music and light flowing through it, and in it the Spirit of the Earth is laid asleep, and from a star upon this spirit-child's forehead beams of light 'make bare the secrets of the Earth's deep heart' and the strange beasts and ruined relics of dead ages. These two children are, of course, Moon and Earth: and they sing songs of joy in the great deliverance, and of mutual love: love of each other and love that is to reign among men: not men, but man, now to be 'one harmonious Soul of many a soul', the subject of love, and the lover and master of all the arts and sciences. At last Demogorgon rises and, calling upon Earth, Moon, Sun and Stars, daemons, gods

and men to listen, proclaims the new kingdom of Love: and so the drama ends.

Is it a drama? It is much more: but is it that? Did Shelley himself mean it to be a drama? It is true that he describes it on the title page as 'A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts', but throughout the long Preface he seems to avoid using the word 'drama', speaking of it in such phrases as 'this poem', 'my composition', and not as 'my drama'. And in fact it has little of drama but Acts and Scenes and a list of *dramatis personae*. In one of his letters (11 April 1822) he calls *Hellas* 'a lyrical dramatic nondescript piece of business': and the words are equally applicable to his *Prometheus*. In both the lyrical element overwhelms the dramatic. They represent his genius which was overwhelmingly lyrical. Of the fact that the drama was a thing altogether alien to that genius his own confessions are the clearest proof. 'As to real flesh and blood, you know I do not deal in those articles' is not the language of a dramatist: nor do dramatists say of their work what Shelley said of *Prometheus*, that it 'was never intended for more than five or six persons'. Drama is an affair of men and women: and Shelley's imagination preferred creating angels and fiends. He could not even project himself into his drama. Thanks to Hogg and Trelawny and his own epistles in verse and prose we know that he was a much more human person than his Laon or his Prometheus: as the women of his circle were much more human than his Cythna or his Asia. What we get in his dramas is Lord Eldon as he supposed Lord Eldon to be, or (what is much the same thing) himself as Lord Eldon supposed him to be: or else himself or his friends, male or female, especially female, as his imagination, always the most selective and exclusive of imaginations, attenuated or spiritualized them. What we never get is Lord Eldon or Emilia Viviani or himself as they really were, in flesh and

blood. For Eldon we get his Jupiters and Cencis, for Emilia his Asias and Iones, for himself his Prometheus. In place of a drama we get a piece of divinely beautiful propaganda, in which the angels of love and light are seen defeating the devils of darkness, and we are never allowed to feel a moment's sympathy with the devils, or a moment's doubt or distrust of the angels. Shelley really hated cruelty and wrong and loved love and justice as very few men do. He has had his reward. He himself, and not merely his poetry, has been loved with a passionate devotion which hardly any other poet has ever won. But neither this temperament nor this reward is that of the dramatist. Some one has said, I think, that the dramatist understands all men and judges none, leaving judgement to God. One might go further. One might almost say that he sympathizes with all men. When one thinks of Macbeth or Richard III or Iago, one sees the gulf between a great dramatist and Shelley. Shelley could have given us the devil in Iago: but he could never have made us understand how it came about that such a devil was generally rather trusted and liked. Shakespeare could. No devil could blind him. He could see the sort of good fellow there was in Iago which most people found so likeable that they never guessed the man's real nature which Shelley would have seen and loathed and made incredible by seeing nothing else.

And there is another difference. Drama is not only an affair of flesh and blood in which Shelley did not deal. It is an affair of earth on which he could not stay. In no poet, I suppose, are such words as 'sail' and 'float' and 'soar' nearly so frequent as they are in Shelley;

'And we sail on away, afar, without a course, without a star'

says Asia in this poem. But such words are words alien to the drama. Drama cannot live in air or water. It is a thing firm not fluid, a thing not invisible but visible. Indeed it is more than that; a thing of closely knit and compacted plan. But that is just what the genius of Shelley, floating

on an ocean of dreams, soaring in clouds of vision, not at his own will but as the airy and watery currents carry him, could not ever, except for once in *The Cenci*, find endurable or even possible.

All this being so, the *Prometheus Unbound* could not be a great dramatic triumph, even in the closet, to say nothing of the stage. Yet, if Shelley was to write a drama founded on the Greek, it is easy to see why he chose this subject. First there was the attraction of Aeschylus, whose lyrical, prophetic, theological genius was certainly more akin to Shelley's than that of either Sophocles or Euripides. Moreover the stage which he represents in the evolution of the Greek drama, one in which the Chorus still retains a good deal of its original predominance while the plot and action are of the simplest, would be more congenial to Shelley than the later stage in which the plot has become as intricate and important as Aristotle thought it ought to be, and as Shelley was incapable of making it. And if Shelley turned to Aeschylus it is not difficult to find reasons why he should turn particularly to Prometheus. There is much that would inevitably attract him in the *Prometheus Vinctus*. He liked creating supernatural persons, spirits and personifications of Nature. All the characters in the *Prometheus* are either gods like Hephaestus and Hermes, or personifications of natural forces or abstract qualities, like Ocean, the Nymphs, Kratos and Asia. Even Io is a semi-divine personage, the victim of the love of Zeus and the hatred of Hera, the ancestress of the divine Heracles who was to deliver Prometheus. There is the first attraction for Shelley : a list of *dramatis personae* which does not contain a single human being. Then there is the attraction of the airy remoteness of the scene : somewhere in the Caucasus, we can never say exactly where ; some vague and distant mountain height, a place of clouds and storms and darkness : what could be more congenial to Shelley whose life was one continuous

effort to escape from the known to the unknown? One never knows exactly where one is in any of his longer poems. Is there one of them except *The Cenci* and *Charles the First* which has a recognizable scene of action? Who can say where he is in *Alastor* or *The Witch of Atlas*, or even in *Hellas*? How many, too, of his lyrics have their action in the air, or in some world of spirits more ethereal and immaterial even than air itself? It is notable that his greatest nature poems are addressed to a wind and a cloud, and that when he addresses an ode to a bird it is not to the nightingale but to that bird of the air whom he expressly calls the Skylark. So the Prometheus story would attract him as giving him another way of escape, such as he had always loved, from the inhabited earth to the regions of cloud and air.

Then another thing that would be congenial to him is the method of travel which the personages of the *Prometheus Vinctus* employ. The Nymphs come to Prometheus in a winged car, and they actually remain suspended in this airy car somehow till line 280, when at the request of Prometheus they descend to earth 'with light foot stepping forth from their wind-precipitate chair, and quitting the air, the pure moving-place of the birds'. As they do so their father Ocean arrives, he too in airy fashion riding upon a winged beast. And even Io, though she does not fly, is hardly a walker on the common road of earth: for she is always leaping (σκιρτᾷ) under the attacks of the gadfly, and has been, and is to be, a wanderer by mysterious ways to unknown places. What can be more like Shelley's people, so many of whom, not only his Hours and Asia and Panthea here, but his Witch and his Laon and Cythna, travel on their strange journeys in similar airy fashion?

Then, again, of all Greek plays, except perhaps the *Bacchae*, the *Prometheus* is, I suppose, the fullest of Nature. And of Shelley's nature, the nature which 'man did not make and cannot mar'. Those famous first words of Prometheus,

ὦ δῖος αἰθήρ, 'O divine air and swift-winged breezes, O fountains of streams and innumerable smiles of the waves of the sea, O Mother Earth, and all-seeing Sun' carry us at once to the world in which Shelley was most at home. While Wordsworth, Keats, and Tennyson amaze and delight us by their knowledge of the actual surface of the earth on which we live, Shelley is seldom content to leave us there: he hurries us away to the heights and spaces of heaven, to this very δῖος αἰθήρ, where we find it so hard to breathe, or else to those 'sacred spaces of the sea', so immeasurable and so empty, which another great poet, disciple at once of Aeschylus and of Shelley, has made the last word of one of his greatest lyrics.

The *Prometheus Vinctus* is, in fact, like nearly all the poems of Shelley, neither particular, nor local, nor national, nor even earthly, as all the other dramas of Aeschylus are: it is rather, what Shelley loved to be, cosmic and universal.

And there is one other attraction which it must have had for him; it is political and theological and occasionally almost religious. Prometheus is a sort of saviour of mankind: he represents love as opposed to hatred, liberty as opposed to tyranny, hope substituted for fear, all the arts and abundances of life taking the place of ignorance, poverty, pain and misery. Is not that exactly what Shelley was always trying himself to be, what he was always picturing in the heroes of his poems? There was, in fact, everything in Prometheus to attract him. The eager utilitarian that he was would delight in the useful arts which the hero had given to men, the revolutionary republican would joyfully catch up the denunciations of the tyranny of Zeus, the moralist would join in hatred of its cruelty, the prophet in prophesying its doom.

There are all these ways, then, in which the *Prometheus Vinctus* would inevitably be congenial to Shelley. And, indeed, his drama is founded on that of Aeschylus. It, too,

has divine personages, a remote and mysterious scene of action, a conflict between a hero and a tyrant, a political and religious revolution of which the most elemental and tremendous powers of nature are, as it were, the spectators and assessors. Yet how unlike the two are! And does not most of the unlikeness come from the lack in Shelley of the definite, the concrete and the human, of the preponderance in him of spirit over body, of the ideal over the real? There are obscurities in the story of Aeschylus: in the story of Shelley there is almost nothing else. How shadowy his characters are beside those of Aeschylus? How inhumanly thin they are to us who ask for something of which our senses can take hold! Supernatural personages have seldom proved easy passengers for poetry to carry. In Homer, Virgil, and Milton they are seldom impressive and often a stumbling-block: for where there is omnipotence there cannot be any real conflict. But, in the *Prometheus* of Aeschylus, not only is Zeus not omnipotent, as the prophecy of his fall shows—and in Shelley's play, of course, his actual fall—but he is not a mere devil, as Shelley makes him, nor is Prometheus a pure saint like Shelley's hero. The Zeus of Aeschylus is only partly the tyrant of heaven: he is partly also the Highest God whom the pious Nymphs, the friends of Prometheus, honour and revere. So all the minor personages are humanized in a way of which Shelley had not the secret. There is more of human nature in the opening scene between Kratos and Hephaestus than in all the *Prometheus Unbound*. There are no recognizable qualities in Panthea, Ione, or Asia: they are all a mist of ideal love and beauty. But how well Aeschylus has distinguished Hephaestus from Kratos, the daughters of Ocean from Ocean himself. The daughters exhibit none of the blind 'heroics' of Shelley's nymphs: they are timid, prudent, and occasionally critical. But their sympathy is genuine and can show its reality by its courage at the

dangerous moment. Their father Ocean, on the other hand, is an elderly coward who merely wishes to make a respectable appearance. The 'Force' of Aeschylus makes on us an impression of enjoying the business of bullying Prometheus which Shelley's far more abstract Furies only occasionally convey and sometimes contradict. The physical tortures inflicted on Prometheus in the *Vinctus* are only too real to us: and man will have to make a great spiritual advance before a related account of the injustices of the world, which is the torture inflicted by Shelley's Furies, will seem equally real or likely to cause suffering nearly so acute. Even Io, horned as she is and so tediously geographical, is quite as interesting as Asia and her sisters, though immeasurably less beautiful. Our difficulty about Shelley's figures is their lack of solidity: we cannot see them. Io is, after all, a woman who has had tremendous adventures. Asia is only a spirit who has had dreams.

But of course the principal contrast between the two poets is provided by Prometheus himself. Aeschylus had not been content to reproduce the story as he found it. He had got rid of the childish and unworthy tricks (like the cheating of Zeus in the sacrifice) which deformed the early legend of Prometheus. Primitive peoples, as we see in the story of Jacob and Esau, do not mind their heroes being credited with shabby tricks of this sort. But Aeschylus had got past that stage. His Prometheus is a figure of high moral nobility who could not stoop to employ any petty arts in his sublime war with the tyrant. But, heroic as he is, he is still human. Aeschylus has turned the trickster of the legend into a prophet of justice and a saviour of mankind, but he has not moralized him out of human recognition. His Prometheus has a very human hatred of his enemies, a strong man's impatience with weakness, a free man's scorn of slaves. He conceals neither the pain he suffers nor the desire of revenge with which it fills him.

But Shelley has carried the process of moralization so far as to substitute perfection for sublimity, and the gains of ethics are often the losses of art. Art is humanity, and humanity and perfection are terms which never meet. The whole of Shelley's drama, and not least the character of Prometheus, demands for its right appreciation a highly spiritualized being at his most intellectual and spiritual moment: the reader is never given a rest, never a chance of sinking back on his five senses: all the ordinary levels of his mind and character are utterly ignored, left far below, 'outsoared' as Shelley himself would say. But only a very few of us climb these heights often or can remain long on them: and poetry, which demands our weakness as well as our strength, loses by confining its appeal to so rare and elect a company. Every one can understand and be moved by the Prometheus of Aeschylus: many men who have both brains and imagination are rather exhausted than interested by Shelley's Prometheus. The difference between them is partly the difference between the Satan and the Almighty Father and Son of *Paradise Lost*. Milton *could* not give these last, and Shelley *would* not give his Prometheus, what Satan and the Prometheus of Aeschylus have in such magnificent abundance:

> the unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what is else not to be overcome.

And every one feels, with or without shame, with or without a thought of 'Blessed are the meek', that, as we are at present, these are qualities which, in art, certainly interest us, and possibly attract us, far more than the abstract perfection with which Shelley loved to endow his characters. The truth is, as Aristotle knew, that absolute perfection is not dramatic material. In the *Prometheus*, in the *Oedipus*, and even in the *Antigone*, there is some admixture of

self-will which enables us to feel a conflict : there is something to be said for Zeus and for Creon. There is nothing at all to be said for Shelley's Jupiter. The doctrine of Aristotle is confirmed by the practice of Shakespeare. The great critic had said that the sufferings of a perfectly good man ' merely shock us '. They arouse neither pity nor fear. Nor do those of an utter villain : for ' pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves '. For these reasons the hero of a tragedy should, according to Aristotle, be one who is ' not eminently good, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by depravity but by some error or frailty '. Is not this true of Hamlet and Lear and Othello and Romeo and Richard II and Brutus and Antony ? None of these is either perfectly good or entirely bad. ' Richard III and Macbeth ', says Mr. Bradley, ' are the only heroes of Shakespeare who do what they themselves recognize to be villainous.' And, as he adds, Shakespeare has felt this difficulty, and has managed to make a sort of compensation by giving Richard extraordinary powers and courage, and Macbeth a conscience so terrifying (and, he might have added, a brain and imagination so exceptional) that they compel ' a horrified sympathy and awe which balance, at the least, the desire for the hero's ruin '.

On the whole, then, whatever may be the case with lyric, it seems that the ' heroes ' of drama must present to us an intensified representation of human nature as we know it, with the shadows darkened as well as the lights heightened, not some bright shadowless picture of it such as in rare moments we may imagine. The world of the dramatist must be the many-coloured glass of life and body, not the white radiance of spirit and eternity. But Shelley was, all his life, preacher and propagandist as well as poet, and there is no part of his poetry which suffered so much by that as his dramas. And nothing so much as his *Prometheus*. He had learnt from Plato and from Christianity that a divine being must

be wholly good, and he actually applies to his Prometheus the purge which Plato proposed to apply to Homer. The result is that his Prometheus neither hates his enemies nor pities himself, and, in consequence, like the Christ of the *Paradise Lost* or Dante's Beatrice (though she has occasionally a certain human tartness) is scarcely felt to be human at all. As his Panthea and Ione never show the weakness of timidity and prudence which make the Nymphs of Aeschylus so 'probable', in the Aristotelean sense, so the 'passion for reforming the world', which he confesses in his interesting Preface, has led him to purify his hero till, having no weaknesses, he seems to have no life and, in consequence, interests us very little. No poet more than Shelley, and no drama more than his *Prometheus*, raises that curious question: could drama, could any kind of literature, exist in a world perfectly conquered by Christianity? Does not tragedy depend on the probability of wickedness and comedy on that of folly? And both, especially comedy, on the beauty or pleasantness in art of what is, or ought to be, hateful or contemptible in character; of what, in fact, would disappear in a perfectly good world? And can any one who cares for art think of himself as quite happy in a world in which Falstaff and Célimène, Mr. Collins and Becky Sharp, would be alike impossible?

For these reasons there can be no doubt that, considered merely as drama, Shelley's drama poem is immeasurably less interesting than the *Prometheus Vinctus*. We are human beings, a number of individuals, who have no wish to forget our separate identities in an abstract humanity. But 'Man, oh, not men', 'man one harmonious soul', 'a chain of linkèd thought, Of love and might to be divided not', is the cry which he puts into the mouth of the Spirit of Earth in the beautiful lyric of his fourth Act. But we, and the drama, ask for variety, for all the pellmell of human differences. So, too, we are men, not emanations

of Nature, and our dramatic suspicions are aroused when he tells us in the Preface that Nature, the awakening of the spring 'among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees' which then happily filled the Baths of Caracalla, was 'the inspiration of this drama'. For drama is a human thing and cannot be inspired solely or even chiefly by nature.

Nor even by a passion for righteousness, Shelley's other and still more potent inspiration. It is curious that the poet who was expelled from his University, and afterwards deprived of his children by the law, on the ground of his atheism and immorality, should be the most distinctively Christian of our poets. No poet owes so much to Christianity, no poet would gain so much by the Christianization of the world. He would probably himself have said that his debt was mainly to Plato. And certainly no Englishman has inherited so much of the moral side of the genius of Plato. Of Plato's charming playfulness, of that side of him which suggests an exceptionally cultivated man enjoying life in a brilliant aristocratic society, Shelley has nothing. But that is only a small fragment of Plato and never the dominant feature. What is dominant is the poet and artist (though he professed to distrust poets) and still more the moralist and thinker, that is, the seer. It has been well said that his grave note about morals has something like a Semitic austerity about it and almost anticipates the Christian sense of sin. Of all this Shelley caught a great deal, as he shows everywhere and especially in the *Prometheus*. The poem is one prolonged and fervent expression of his Platonic and Christian hatred of all kinds of wrong, and of his faith, which is Platonic but has not always been Christian, that it is only our blindness which prevents our seeing that the world in which we live is one of infinite beauty and delight and the type and promise of another which is invisible, spiritual, and eternal.

Nowhere, I suppose, among the moderns, not even in Wordsworth, has this creed of Plato's found such utterance as in the poetry of Shelley. But there were things in Shelley which Plato could not give him. The repentant prayer for his enemy, which he puts into the mouth of Prometheus, 'I wish no living thing to suffer pain', could scarcely, perhaps, have been learnt from Plato: nor the peculiarly Christian praise of meekness which occurs several times in the poem: nor the consciousness that the tragedy of the world lies in the fact that 'the wise want love': nor the vision 'Of one who gave an enemy His plank—then plunged aside to die': nor, indeed, that whole conception which is the very foundation of his drama, the faith that Love is the healer, the saviour, the redeemer of mankind: that Love indeed is God, and God is Love.

The movement of civilization has been said to be from simple to complex, and that renders the problem of the artist ever more and more difficult. He has to compress and simplify—it is the essence of his business—and now the material to be simplified is so much vaster and more varied. The task which Shelley gave himself was much more difficult than that of Aeschylus, and, compared with Aeschylus, he failed in it. As a drama his poem is, on the whole, a failure. It never moves us dramatically. But if he could not make a drama of the story of Prometheus, what a thing of inexhaustible riches it is which he has made! He is not greater than Aeschylus. But he is far richer. Beside his royal abundance of thought and vision and heart and imagination Aeschylus sinks almost into poverty. We may be no nearer settling the fundamental problems of thought and being than the Greeks, but how much more we have behind us in experience of every sort, political, scientific, religious! Shelley's mind was not accurate or scientific. But it was extraordinarily alert and susceptible, and the two thousand years which separated him from Aeschylus fill his drama

with a kind of fullness which that of Aeschylus could not have. It has been supposed to have been meant as a sort of symbolical or allegorical history of the world. Mr. W. M. Rossetti and other critics have worked out elaborate interpretations of it. For Mr. Rossetti, for instance, Prometheus is the mind of man, and Jupiter the vicissitude of things which the mind of man deified and enthroned on a foundation of 'faith and fear': against which it is seen in the drama successfully revolting after three thousand years of superstitious slavery. So Asia is Nature (or, as other critics quite as plausibly suggest, Love), and Demogorgon is Eternity. I do not here discuss such theories: for my subject is Shelley's drama as a drama and its relation to the Promethean legend and in particular to the tragedy of Aeschylus. With the question whether the poem contains a concealed allegory, and if so what that allegory is, I am not now concerned. There are only two things which I would just note about it. It would be clear even without the testimony of Mary Shelley—who, it is curious to remember, called her *Frankenstein* 'the Modern Prometheus'—that Shelley's poem had a philosophical meaning. That is written all over it. It is one more embodiment of his doctrine that evil comes of bad institutions and would disappear if goodwill and love took their place. But the details of the meaning are another thing. Shelley was before all things a poet: and the poet's abundance of images and emotions was always drowning, or at least obscuring, the thoughts of the thinker. He loved philosophy as few poets have, and no doubt he meant his great poem to be a shadowing forth of his reading of the ultimate issues of human life. But I question whether he could, without great loss, have translated that shadowing into logical prose: and I question still more whether any one else can. So long as such interpretations remain tentative and fragmentary, only claiming the rank of suggestions, they are useful helps to the study of the

poem. But directly they pretend to set out its secret in a logical sequence of allegory they seem to me to run the risk of becoming more dangerous than helpful.

But to return to the poem itself. Whatever its interpretation may be, the *Prometheus Unbound* remains probably the richest storehouse of great poetry which its poetic century produced. The poet who of all in that century, with the possible exception of Tennyson, was the best judge of his art, gave to Shelley alone among the moderns a place in the Blessed Islands among the great poets of antiquity. And when we come fresh from the *Prometheus* we cannot wonder at Carducci's tribute. How its splendours follow fast upon each other all through, from that superb opening speech of Prometheus to the final lyric of prophesying Love with which Demogorgon concludes it! The intellectual beauty of these things is indeed impaired by Shelley's lack of clarity: his statements, his pictures, his metaphors and similes, have a way of dissolving into each other which makes it extraordinarily difficult to follow them. But their power and beauty, alike intellectual and sensuous, moral and spiritual, is in truth inexhaustible. No poetry gains more by repeated re-reading: only that indeed can build the ladder which we ordinary men need before we can climb to the heights on which Shelley habitually lived.

The third Prometheus is again a recasting of Aeschylus so as to make the legend serve a modern interest. But the interests of Goethe and Shelley were very different, and their dramas reflect the contrast between the two men. Shelley (so far following Aeschylus) is mainly interested in the moral and political conflict between Prometheus and Jupiter; he and his Prometheus direct their indignation almost entirely against the selfishness and cruelty of the tyrant. In Goethe's fragmentary drama, on the other hand, it is the impotence, idleness, and dullness of the life of the gods which provokes the scorn of Prometheus. Whether Goethe

conceives Prometheus as suffering physical tortures is not very clear. Nothing is said about that side of the legend. Prometheus never complains. Perhaps the physical aspect of the story would have seemed primitive and barbarous to Goethe. Anyhow he leaves it out, as well as much else which Shelley, who never saw Goethe's drama, was to retain. In Goethe's hands, in fact, the whole drama is transferred from the physical, political and moral spheres to the intellectual, aesthetic and social.

It consists, as we have it, of three very short Acts. The first shows Prometheus talking with Mercury who brings offers from Zeus which Prometheus utterly declines to consider, repudiating all obligations to Zeus (described as his father) and saying that it is Time, all-powerful Time, not his parents, who has given him the spirit and power to defy the Titans and be what he is. He claims to be no god and asks whether these all-powerful gods are so all-powerful in reality. Can they put the earth into his hand or separate him from himself? The reply is Fate; just as in Aeschylus and in Shelley, Fate appears as something above Zeus himself. But while to Shelley the mention of Fate suggests the sublime faith that there is one thing not subject to it (to Fate, he says, 'all things are subject but eternal Love'), to Goethe the word is made the occasion of such an answer as might have come from the Satan of Milton. 'Then they are Fate's subjects as much as I? I serve no slaves.' Prometheus is left with the clay figures he has made, wishing he could give them life and feeling. Epimetheus comes and advises his brother to accept the offer of the gods to share their power, but Prometheus says they may keep what is their own: he will not share anything with them; he will not surrender his own sphere which, as he proudly tells Epimetheus, in language which plainly expresses the personal feeling of Goethe, is 'the whole circle which his activity can fill'. He turns back to the figures into which his spirit is out-

poured, in which he has set his happiness. Minerva, whom he loves, then enters, apparently hoping to induce him to submit. But he tells her his powers are his own, and he will use them at his own will, not at the bidding of the gods. He has served the gods but has been disappointed with them. He finds himself as wise, as good, nay, as eternal as they. She replies that Jupiter bids him give his figures life on condition that he accepts the terms laid down. Prometheus declines to be a slave or to make his children slaves. Minerva then abandons her attempt to persuade him and offers to defy Jupiter and show Prometheus the fountain of life which it is for Fate, not Jupiter, to give or take away. He cries in rapture that his creatures shall live and be free and Minerva shall see their gratitude in their joy.

The second Act shows Mercury reporting to Jupiter the rebellion of Minerva. But Jupiter is not alarmed. All beings are and must be his servants : the children of Prometheus will only add to their number. Next we see Prometheus rejoicing over his human beings, a race, like himself, born both to suffer and to enjoy and to care nothing for Jupiter. The next scene shows him teaching them the arts of building and healing and others : shows them beginning to quarrel over their property and fight about it ; and Prometheus healing and reconciling, and telling them that they are a mixed breed, half fool, half god. His final lesson, given to Pandora, is that of death. She has seen her sister die : and he tells her death is the fulfilment of all that we hope and fear and dream and enjoy in this varied and wonderful life : death crowns life : and apparently, (if I understand the passage aright), after all experiences have been dissolved in a storm of bliss, life renews itself again as before ; the old life of hopes and fears and desires.

The last Act consists of a single noble soliloquy of Prometheus. This was written separately, soon after the first two Acts, and was not originally intended to be connected with

them. I think the difference between them has been exaggerated. Goethe's decision to use the poem, which he had published in 1789, as the third Act of the drama which was not printed till 1830, has been treated as absurd and a mere piece of carelessness. No doubt the soliloquy, which was probably written a year or more later than the drama, scarcely appears to continue the action as the second Act had left it. It goes back to the defiance of Jupiter from which we had got away. And there seems to be no reason why Prometheus should still be creating men, as in the second Act they were evidently multiplying by natural means. Moreover, the final stage-direction about Minerva is inexplicable; for there seems no room for further mediation. Yet one does not wonder that Goethe joined the poem to the drama, with which it is after all closely, even verbally, connected, and to which it gives a touch of sublimity wanting in the earlier Acts, and called for by the name of Prometheus and the memory of Aeschylus.

The soliloquy is addressed by Prometheus to Zeus. It treats him and the other gods with scorn and defiance. Zeus, says Prometheus, cannot touch either the houses or the hearths which Prometheus has given to men. The gods are poor pitiable creatures and would starve but for credulous fools. Why, asks Prometheus, should he honour those who never eased a burden or dried a tear? Did you dream, he cries to Zeus, that I should hate life because not all its buds come to bloom? No: I sit here and make more and more men in my own image, men who shall suffer, and enjoy, and live, as I live, heedless of you.

Dramatists, unless they are the very greatest, tend, like Prometheus, to make men in their own image. Even Shakespeare, some have thought, gives us the two halves of himself in Hamlet and Henry V. In any case, as the Samson of Milton is Milton himself and the Prometheus of Shelley is plainly a glorified Shelley in action, so Goethe's Prometheus

is Goethe, interested in art rather than in ethics or politics, delighting and believing in life's varied spectacle of joy and sorrow, expecting disappointments but undaunted by them, hating idleness more than sin, believing in himself, his own spirit and his power of work, as the true makers of his life, taking the world as he finds it, without any wish to escape from the real and visible and bodily to any sphere of ideal perfection. Goethe's purely intellectual temperament seems to place him in a sense midway between Aeschylus and Shelley. There is nothing in his Prometheus of the Satanic element of pride and revenge which appears in the hero of the *Vinctus*: and still less of the Christlike patience and goodness which pervade every utterance of Shelley's Prometheus. What interests Goethe is neither individual revenge nor universal love: it is art and life. He feels, it would seem, the dullness of so many imagined worlds of spirit and perfection, a dullness which Shelley does not altogether escape: feels that such worlds, having in them no sorrow, no struggle, and, perhaps he would have added, no sin, would inevitably be uninteresting. Their life would be static, not dynamic. The goal of his Prometheus is not the transformation of a world of tortured victims into one of blissful spirits: it is a transformation of the slaves of fear, routine and stupidity into freemen who, in their own right and of their own will, choose the activities, face the conflicts, and submit to the disappointments of their varied and interesting life.

Of other poetic handlings of the Prometheus story I have left myself little space to speak. And none certainly compares in importance with those of Aeschylus and Shelley. Byron's *Hymn*, written while he was with Shelley on the Lake of Geneva, is of no great importance. Mr. William Vaughan Moody's drama, *The Fire Bringer*, the first of a Trilogy, not yet completed, is obscure and difficult reading, though it never fails to impress one with a certain grandeur

of style and conception. But Prometheus plays a comparatively small part in it, the chief actors being Deucalion and Pyrrha and the survivors of the great flood, to whom Prometheus brings the fire. It has little relation to the dramas of Aeschylus, Shelley, or Goethe.

The scholarly and beautiful drama of Mr. Bridges, on the other hand, bears obvious traces of Aeschylus and has several parallels with both Shelley and Goethe. He calls it *Prometheus the Firegiver*, and, contrary, I believe, to the opinion of most modern scholars, makes the πυρφόρος refer to the giving of fire which preceded and caused the punishment of Prometheus as exhibited in the *Vinctus*. His plot is simple. By the cruelty of Zeus, who desired to degrade men to the life of brutes, the earth has been deprived of fire. Prometheus comes to Argos to give it. He finds King Inachus about to sacrifice to Zeus and, advocating rebellion instead of prayer, offers Inachus fire, admitting that there will be a penalty to pay for it. Inachus accepts the risk, hoping to see earth fairer than ever, as now to be 'clothed with the works of men'. To which Prometheus replies in a beautiful speech which Goethe would have liked; declaring that

> nature's varied pleasaunce
> Without man's life is but a desert wild,
> Which most, where most she mocks him, needs his aid.
> She knows her silence sweeter when it girds
> His murmurous cities, her wide wasteful curves
> Larger beside his economic line.

He goes on to prophesy, more in the vein of Shelley, a new race of men

> To tread down tyranny and fashion forth
> A virgin wisdom to subdue the world,
> To build for passion an eternal song.

The Chorus close the first part with a beautiful and most characteristic ode on Wonder, which is pure Bridges.

The second part gives the fears and opposition of the queen, Argeia, who sets forth the unhappy fate of all, Salmoneus, Niobe, and the rest, who defied the gods. Inachus replies, in very Shelleyan vein, that, even if he and she and their children suffer, the world will gain; and bids her not to forget that a good man's children are not only those 'of his loins engendered' but all the children of his love 'as sand upon the shore'. Prometheus then foretells the fate of Io, the daughter of Inachus, repeating, in a spirit which I cannot but think pedantic, the tedious Aeschylean account of Io's wanderings, and hinting at his own dread fate. The Chorus sing to Man an ode of his sad life, sad for others if not for himself, with

> No strength for thee but the thought of duty,
> Nor any solace but the love of beauty.

Inachus asks his deliverer's name, but Prometheus only gives the fire and slips away unobserved as it breaks out to the joy of the Chorus. But he has left his name 'newly writ' on the altar in place of the name of Zeus. The play ends with a prophecy of the fall of Zeus and the coming of a god who

> By mercy and truth shall be known,
> In love and peace shall arise.

Unlike Shelley, Mr. Bridges is quite aware of how much he has been influenced by Christianity: and this Christian ending is quite characteristic of him. But he is no man of Utopias; his love and peace and truth are forces working on the life we know, not transforming it to an unrecognizable life of spirit. Here, as always, he is rather an artist and a thinker than a demonic genius of the order of the great three whom we have been discussing. He has allowed himself to be too much influenced by scholarship, retaining what is dead as well as what is alive in Aeschylus. But his drama has great and characteristic beauties. Almost all

through it makes on us the impression, which no English poet makes more continuously, that the thing said is something which the poet has himself thought or felt as an actual experience or conviction of his own. It is full of his thoughtfulness, his sanity, his hold on the life of men and women, his love of nature and art, his active interest in science, his unfailing felicities of phrase and rhythm. There is in Mr. Bridges a tenderness which is scarcely in Goethe. But on the whole he is nearer to Goethe than to Shelley. His Promethean fire gives men back to all the fullness and variety of life: and the life is earthly, bodily, intellectual, aesthetic, at least as much as moral and spiritual. There is never a page, never a speech in it, which does not exhibit the poet's curiosity and sensitiveness, his enjoyment of the pleasures of discovery, his delight in beauty wherever he can find it, in sight or sound. The Prometheus of Aeschylus boasts that he gave men all the arts. That is what the Prometheus of Mr. Bridges also gives: and the likeness and unlikeness of their gifts is the measure of the vitality of a great legend like this, at once so old and so new. Whoever touches Prometheus must go back to Aeschylus. That is true. But it is almost equally true that we cannot now go back to the *Prometheus Vinctus* without carrying with us much which, whatever its ultimate debt to Aeschylus, could not have been present to the minds of an Athenian audience. Aeschylus dies and Milton and Goethe and Shelley. But poetry lives; and the more we know of her the more we perceive how much she loves to bind her servants together till each helps each and all are one.

DON QUIXOTE[1]

A TERCENTENARY LECTURE

I FEEL the honour of being asked to come and speak at this College. But you must let me tell you this. I did not select my subject. That was selected for me by Professor Morley and by the revolutions of the sun. I should get out of my depth at once if I were to try to say what it is that the sun does every year. But, whatever it is, the reason of my being here and speaking of what I am to speak of, is that it has done it three hundred times since Cervantes died. So we yield to the illusions produced by what seems the most exact and veracious of the sciences. There is no essential reason why we should think any more of Cervantes when he has been dead three hundred years than when the number was only two hundred and ninety-nine or two hundred and ninety-eight. But even in the sciences we are the slaves of our imaginations, and because we have found it convenient to count by hundreds we suppose ourselves to remember and worship on the same principle.

However, here we are arrived at this great year 1916: great enough of itself, indeed, big with battle and death and with the fate and shaping of the future of the world. But that is not the greatness I am to speak of. My subject is another greatness which it has, at least for these mathematically-governed imaginations of ours: the greatness which belongs to it as the three hundredth anniversary of the deaths of Shakespeare and Cervantes. And it is only, or chiefly, of the lesser half of this greatness that I am to speak, the half least known in England, the half that comes from our great enemy of those days, from Spain, and from the greatest of Spanish writers,

[1] Delivered at the University College, Reading, 22nd June 1916.

Cervantes. And even of him it is a part only, and not the whole, with which I am to deal: not all his works but his greatest work, the most famous and longest-lived of all the prose story-books of Europe, the immortal history of Don Quixote de la Mancha.

I wish to be perfectly frank with you. There is a certain boldness, to which some would give a worse name, in my venturing to speak of *Don Quixote*. I am no Spanish scholar. I can just read Spanish, but not quickly, or without the help of a dictionary; and, as to Cervantes, I have read little of his other works. I am therefore in a double difficulty. What I am going to speak of is one of the great classics of the whole world. Being then, as I say, no Spanish scholar, I have against me, not only my own lack of any exceptional knowledge but the certainty of your possessing ordinary knowledge. To praise *Don Quixote* is like praising the Elgin marbles or Westminster Abbey. One cannot begin it without a consciousness that other people have done it already and left nothing for us to do.

And yet that is just what it is of the very essence of a classic to disprove. The praise of a classic can never be finished. There may be nothing absolutely new to say about it. But, if it be really a classic, the old things said about it take a new face for each generation. Each century, each people, sees it afresh, the same and not the same. How much more the great chapters of Isaiah, how immeasurably more the deepest of the Psalms, mean to us than they could mean to the Hebrews who first heard them! 'Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw herself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.' 'Into thy hands I commend my spirit.' 'Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord: Lord, hear my voice.' What a world of life and power there is now in such words as these which at their first saying there could not possibly be! And this is still

more the case where the writer is a known historical figure and association and affection gather round the man as well as round his work. Take such a figure as Virgil. How much there is in his voice for us which there could not be for Augustus or Horace ! To our ears he brings memories of the magician of mediaeval legend ; of the companion of Dante through Hell and Purgatory ; of the passionate admiration of the Renaissance scholars ; of that different admiration of the age of ' correctness ' which is summed up in Voltaire's ' Homère a fait Virgile, dit-on : si cela est, c'est son meilleur ouvrage ' ; of later devotion such as Edward FitzGerald's outburst after speaking of the indecency of Catullus : ' Oh my dear Virgil never fell into that : he was fit to be Dante's companion beyond even Purgatory ' ; and Tennyson's magisterial tribute :

> I salute thee, Mantovano,
> I that loved thee since my day began,
> Wielder of the stateliest measure
> Ever moulded by the lips of man.

Or take Shakespeare. Does the worship of three centuries make no difference to our thought of him to-day ? Don't we sometimes, as we read him, remember the ' love and honour, on this side idolatry ' of one great man who was very unlike him, and the ' wonder and astonishment ' of a still greater who was still more unlike ? Do not some of us remember that he was the ' closet companion ' of Charles I in the ' solitudes of his last days ' ? And can any of us forget the praises that have been lavished or the light that has been thrown on him by that long line of masters of criticism which stretches from Dryden through Johnson and Goethe and Coleridge and Lamb to the great interpreter of our own day, Mr. A. C. Bradley ?

All these things, and a thousand others, have now entered into Shakespeare and become, as it were, a part of him. And as with Shakespeare so with Cervantes. To his own

day he was the writer of the only great novel they knew, of a book which they must have felt to be the herald of a new kind of literature. And something of that we feel still. It is not so very long ago that Macaulay called *Don Quixote* 'certainly without any question the greatest novel in the world'. And in the generation after Macaulay, FitzGerald, who when he was right in his critical instincts was so with a sort of rightness unknown to Macaulay, called *Don Quixote* 'the most delightful of all books', and once wrote from his little sailing-boat: 'I have had *Don Quixote*, *Boccaccio* and my dear *Sophocles* (once more) for company on board: the first of these so delightful that I got to love the very Dictionary in which I had to look out the words.' And now to-day one of the finest of living critics[1] has just gone so daringly far as to call *Don Quixote* 'the wisest and most splendid book in all the world'. In absolute praise, then, of the book in itself, critics of to-day can almost outbid its contemporaries. And how much they possess over and above the book in itself! For them and for us all it now carries all the associations of its many children: such as Butler's *Hudibras*, so witty for a few pages, so tedious after more than a few, because so confined to the controversy of a particular moment and therefore bound to pay the penalty which has nearly always to be paid for a prodigiously successful catching of some passing temper of a man's own generation: or, again, the *Pickwick* of Dickens, which so closely resembles its original not only in having for its chief actors a romantic master and a common-sense servant, but also in the curious fact that both Cervantes and Dickens began with the intention of creating a merely ridiculous figure, fell in love with their creations and turned their fools into something like heroes.

All these and other associations separate us from the

[1] No longer living, alas! It was Sir Walter Raleigh, in a very remarkable article which appeared in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 27th April 1916.

point of view of the original readers. And there are other changes both of loss and gain. Take the loss first. The first readers of *Don Quixote* found it above all things extremely amusing. There is a story of Philip III which illustrates this. It is said that he was one day on the balcony of his palace at Madrid when he noticed a student on the banks of the Manzanares 'reading in a book and from time to time breaking off and knocking his forehead with the palm of his hand, with great tokens of delight'; upon which the king said to those about him 'That scholar is either mad or he is reading *Don Quixote*'. Uncontrollable happiness of laughter was then the accepted result of reading the book. And no doubt to-day only a blockhead can read it without continual amusement. But those who are now overcome by laughter as they read it must be few. Comedy is always of far shorter life than tragedy because it deals so much more with manners which are always changing and so much less with the ultimate things of character which never change. It is only with the help of a commentator that we can catch the point of half the jokes of Aristophanes. So we cannot expect a book which satirized Spanish manners of the sixteenth century to be as amusing to us as it was to Spaniards of that day.

Then those first readers found it, what many to-day will hardly find it, a very exciting book. They could not put it down. There are few things in which the world is more changed than in this matter. In the Middle Ages the interminable legends of chivalry were considered exciting stories, and a person who arrived at a castle with a rambling poem twenty thousand lines long, which he proposed to recite, was a welcome guest received with joy and honour. It is impossible, I suppose, to exaggerate the boredom of life in a mediaeval castle, at any rate for the women, who can often have had nothing whatever to do except to attend mass and contemplate the slow progress of some vast piece

of needlework or tapestry. No doubt they had those eternal resources of gossiping and quarrelling of which no one can deprive even the most abject of slaves. But they are of all times and countries and cannot be brought in to save mediaeval life from Mr. Ker's reproach of a 'horror of infinite flatness'. So it is not surprising that things were found exciting then which we scarcely find exciting now. 'There is nothing', says Brunetière, 'so like one *chanson de geste* as another *chanson de geste*.' But that was not the experience of their first readers, or, if it was, the readers did not mind. We do not find the *Roman de la Rose* an exciting study: but, according to Mr. Saintsbury, it was the most popular book in the world for two centuries. And this capacity for digesting the indigestible lasted to and beyond the time of Cervantes. The Elizabethan English delighted not only in the *Arcadia*, which is not exactly crowded with incident, but in things like the *Euphues* of Lyly, whose story is only, I am told, the fringe of an educational treatise. So, and much more, the French contemporaries of Cervantes delighted in the ten volumes of D'Urfé's *Astrée*, and their children and grandchildren were, like Madame de Sévigné, entranced with the interminable romances of La Calprenède and Mademoiselle de Scudéri. All these continued the tradition of 'heroic', or otherwise fanciful, unreality. And it was into their world that *Don Quixote* was born.

No wonder, then, that it was found exciting. The long history of the romance of adventure had taken a great step forward. The adventures may still be absurd but the characters who meet with them have suddenly come alive. Don Quixote and his Squire, for all the strange world they move in, are the most human of human beings. And so the book has been utterly and permanently victorious, not only over the old books of chivalry which it set out to kill and killed, but over its contemporary rivals which nobody reads to-day.

But it is still a book of impossible adventures which cannot

excite us as it excited its first readers. Indeed, if once we cease to be amused by its humour and charmed by its humanity, we are in danger of being wearied by its improbability and by a certain monotony which its best lovers can hardly deny.

So far we are losers: its original readers found in it qualities which we can no longer find, at least in such fullness as they found. And we have lost the actuality of its satire upon the books of chivalry which they knew well and we do not know at all: just as we have lost Virgil's Roman faith and pride in Rome and the Psalmist's satisfaction in throwing stones at Amalekites and Philistines.

But these losses have their compensations. There are things which we have not lost, which we not only share with the original readers but possess in even greater abundance. They were no doubt at once conscious that a book which pleased people of all ages and conditions must be a good book. When Cervantes wrote the Second Part he was able without fear of contradiction to say of the First: 'children turn its leaves, young people read it, grown men understand it, old people praise it'. The test is not infallible till it has been ratified by time: till *semper* has been added to *ubique* and *ab omnibus*. But it is the least fallible we have. The gravest of English poets has said emphatically that the law of art is pleasure. And people less serious than Wordsworth are certain to say the same thing. We are all ready to subscribe to so agreeable a doctrine as the 'necessity' of poets giving, and our receiving, 'immediate pleasure', and to enjoy Molière's triumph over the fools who found fault with him for breaking the rules: 'je voudrais bien savoir si la grande règle de toutes les règles n'est pas de plaire.' And we and Molière and Wordsworth are as right as we can be. Only we cannot be right, absolutely and finally, till Wordsworth's 'immediate' has become permanent and Molière's pleasure of an evening has lasted for

a century. This final rightness the first readers of *Don Quixote* could not have. But we can. We share their pleasure and their confidence in it; and we add another pleasure and another confidence, or rather certainty, of our own. They could not know, what we know, that the humanity and humour of Cervantes have stood the difficult test of time, and have proved to be founded on what is eternal and universal in our nature, and so to have those qualities about which it is so hard for contemporaries to be certain, the qualities that make a classic. Nor could they know that the hero of Cervantes would become, for all nations, the very name and symbol of an unworldly, unpractical, partly noble and wholly lovable temper, the temper or character which we call quixotic. And there is yet another thing. No one in the sixteenth century, either Spaniard or foreigner, could know that the author of *Don Quixote* was to stand for ever, even to his own countrymen and still more to the world outside, as the accepted and authentic voice of one of the greatest of European nations. All these things are possessions which those first readers could not have and which we cannot lose.

I have been lingering over these general questions and must now come more directly to the book itself. And to its author. There may be a few of you who do not very well know who he was, or when he lived. No one has a right even to touch on history or biography without an outline of dates. Let me give you those that are necessary—they are very few—in the case of Cervantes.

Miguel Cervantes Saavedra was born in 1547. (I give for once his full name in Spanish but I leave the insolence and folly of depriving either him or his hero of the names which English ears have so long known and loved to the pedants who talk about Muhammad and Jahveh and write Virgil with an 'e'.) He fought, with remarkable gallantry, at the famous battle of Lepanto in 1570; but a few years later was

captured by Moorish pirates and kept for five years in slavery at Algiers. Returning to Spain in 1580 he wrote many plays for the stage. But as a dramatist he was soon superseded by Lope de Vega; and it was not till 1605, when the First Part of *Don Quixote* appeared, that his fame and genius were established beyond dispute. It had at once so great a success that it went through five editions in the first half of 1605. Its popularity tempted an impostor to produce a spurious Second Part which appeared in 1614 and gives occasion to some of the most entertaining conversations in the genuine Second Part which appeared in 1615. Cervantes died in 1616, on the 23rd April; that is, nominally, though not really (for Spain already had the New Calendar), on the same day as Shakespeare. He left one illegitimate daughter; through whom he had one granddaughter who died childless before her mother; so that, like Shakespeare and Milton and so many of the greatest, his only ultimate descendants are his books.

That is his life: not a very successful one during its first fifty-seven years. His soldiering had cost him a maimed hand and made him a pirate's slave: his poems and novels and dramas had brought him little return: his activities as royal requisitioner or tax-collector—for he had tried that trade—had turned out even worse, for they had landed him in excommunication and prison. But while he was fighting or gathering taxes so unsuccessfully for the king he was gathering something better for himself: that knowledge of human nature so very seldom attained by the mere book-lover whose life is perhaps the one he would have chosen if it had been his to choose. That rare knowledge, and rarer sympathy and humour, were the immortality of *Don Quixote*. Its Spanish success was soon confirmed by foreign admiration. It was translated into English in 1612, and into French in 1614: and has now, says Mr. Fitzmaurice-Kelly, been more translated than any book except three. I wonder how he

makes this calculation and how many people could guess the three which, if it be correct, have alone beaten *Don Quixote* in this, which is not the worst, test of literary greatness. The first is the Bible, of course, and many people would guess the second which is the *Imitation of Christ*. But I have found no one who guessed the third : and I should certainly not have guessed it myself. It is *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which I should never have supposed to be so very widely read outside England. But those at any rate are Mr. FitzMaurice-Kelly's three. And that means that, if he is right, *Don Quixote* has been more translated than any book in the world which has not had the advantage of being bought and circulated for purposes of religion. Of all the books of Europe none has been so much read simply for its own sake, for the pleasure of it. That early translation into English had one result which is of great interest at this double Tercentenary ; and if fortune had been kinder, might have been of much greater. There is a play called *The History of Cardenio* which is included among those which the Stationers' Company licensed one Moseley to publish in 1653. It was ascribed by him to Fletcher and Shakespeare, was probably, as Sir Sidney Lee safely conjectures, the same play as that called *Cardenno* or *Cardenna* which was twice acted before the Court in 1613, and must have been founded on the adventures of Cardenio as related in the First Part of *Don Quixote*. But, as Moseley did not after all publish it and as no trace of it remains, we cannot now enjoy the study of this curious link, possibly between the two greatest geniuses of Spain and England, certainly between Cervantes and one or other of the dramatists of the great age of English drama.

So much for the author. And now what of the book ? Its scheme is of the simplest. The story is that of a small country squire who gets his head turned by reading those romances of chivalry which had been so universally popular in Spain that even St. Theresa, who might have lived to read

Don Quixote, is described as going crazy over them. He resolves to start out as a knight-errant on the pattern of Amadis of Gaul, Palmerin of England and the rest; and, feeling bound to imitate his heroes in having a lady to whose honour he may dedicate his achievements, chooses a country girl of his neighbourhood to whom, as she had been born at Toboso, he gives the fine name of Dulcinea del Toboso: calls his horse, a sorry jade, by the high sounding, yet comic, name of Rosinante ('formerly a drudge-horse') in imitation of Bucephalus, Babieca and other steeds of famous name; and, after one solitary excursion, remembers that a knight should have a squire, and induces a peasant of his village, one Sancho Panza, to share his delusions at least so far as to expect the reward of an island such as victorious knights had been wont to give their squires, and in that hope to accompany him in his subsequent journeys. And so from that time forward the two are inseparable companions, not only in the travels and adventures recorded in the book but in the greater journey to posterity and immortality. After all, Sancho won something much greater than the island of his hopes: and something which no one would have enjoyed more than he. For the Second Part shows him getting a foretaste of it and exhibiting all a peasant's delight at finding himself in print both in the true First and in the false Second Part.

And he deserved his pleasure. For he has served his master as well in the greater journey as in the less. The book is the record of the adventures which result from such a knight and such a squire setting out on such a quest in the midst of a work-a-day world. The humour of it which, like all the greatest, has in it an element of sadness, lies in the clash, not merely between the adventurers and the world but between the two adventurers themselves. Don Quixote alone would not have been enough. The ideal is scarcely visible without the fact to challenge it, nor the heroic without

the contrast of the commonplace. The two together are life itself, its struggle of elemental duality. Common sense needs its spokesman in every story which is to be true : and it has seldom found a better than Sancho. With his help the book gives us the two extremes between which it is our eternal business to find the middle way : the man of vision who is eager to right all wrongs, especially those which exist only in his own imagination, and the man of no vision who is quite content with things as they are and perceives no wrongs in the way of the world, not even those which are plain as the sun at noon. The temper of poetry has rarely had a finer charm than it has in the knight : that of prose and matter-of-fact was never pleasanter than in the squire. And note there a point of contrast with Dickens. I said just now that Dickens was like Cervantes in having set out to make his central figure ridiculous and ended by making him lovable. But the note of comedy, almost of burlesque, which Pickwick shares with *Don Quixote* is, in Pickwick's case, unrelieved by anything better than an unintelligent and sentimental kindliness. Mr. Pickwick is a very kind old gentleman as well as a very ridiculous old gentleman. But if we go so far as to love him, which we hardly do, our love has in it nothing of admiration. He never inspires us, never greatly moves us : we have no particular feeling about him. With *Don Quixote* it is quite the reverse. As the book progresses we come to love him, yes, and to admire him, as, apart from his central delusion, and not altogether apart from it, one of the most beautiful and moving figures ever created by the human imagination. He is mad, it is true. But it is only on one subject and with a noble sort of madness. On all others, on art, politics, poetry, religion, he is full of good sense, and of more than good sense, of wisdom, of imagination, of charity. Nobody would for a moment dream of saying that of our pleasant English Mr. Pickwick. His is a figure who belongs exclusively to prose comedy. He

has none of that poetic element which belongs to all the greatest figures of comic fiction, making them see their laughter as a moment in an eternity which contains so much beside laughter ; none of that element of the infinite which surges up again and again even through the fleshliness of the greatest figure in English comedy, showing him as at least fitfully aware of the serious issues of life of which his actions are a perpetual defiance. His fondness for religious allusions is not, I fancy, quite all scoffing profanity : ' 'Tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation ' ; ' O if men were to be saved by merit ' ; ' before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing : and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked.' I can't help hearing in all this the voice of an imagination and a conscience which sometimes uneasily wondered what might be behind the pleasant curtains of the tavern. For Pickwick life could not have been anything but a rather insignificant affair whose most active business was eating and drinking. No one did that business more actively than Falstaff. But there is somehow always about him a suggestion that he had had it in him to do other business of a finer sort. He makes us laugh, as Pickwick does : but we feel that our laughter never grasps the whole of him. Even those constant bursts of sheer genius in which he is for ever giving final and immortal utterance to one side of our nature never quite convince us that that is the only side he knows. Still less, of course, can any laughter suppose itself able to give a full account of Don Quixote. There is indeed little laughter in him though much outside him. He has nothing at all of that spirit of wit and pleasure and intellectual contempt which for Falstaff makes the spectacle of the world a perpetual delight. It is not he who perceives the incongruities which have been said to be the essential cause of laughter : he perceives nothing of them, and it is his lack of perception which makes our perception so pleasant. But though he is

without Falstaff's gift of elemental genius he represents a far more central as well as a far nobler type of humanity. Except his single madness there is nothing exaggerated or eccentric about him. He is the perfect type of the Christian gentleman, not only of his own time but of all times.

And the language in which he comes to us is as free of eccentricity and exaggeration as he. Everybody who has read the book even in a translation will have some partial notion of what a master of style Cervantes is ; how easy, how liberal, how gracious, how sane, in one word how classical, his manner of writing is. He may be loose and sometimes ungrammatical, as Mr. FitzMaurice-Kelly says. But these are easily forgiven faults in a man who can write as he can. How rare such writing was then ! It is rare always, of course. But now, if any generation does not produce it, it can at any rate evoke it out of the storehouse of the past. But how little good prose there was to evoke in 1605 ! Verse comes before prose in all literatures, and by that time Italy had much great verse, England a good deal, and France some. And Italy had some classical prose, above all, Boccaccio. But what had England or France to compare with this beautiful prose of Cervantes which has upon it that instant seal of universality which is the seal of immortality as well ? Contrast with it not merely those tedious romances of which I spoke : not merely the *Arcadia* and its like in France and England : but contrast More, Bacon and Hooker, so far as they wrote in English, contrast Rabelais and Montaigne. Several of these, to say nothing of some earlier writers, have one or other kind of greatness to which Cervantes can lay no claim. But none of them seems to me to have that gift of universal approach which was the supreme endowment of Cervantes. Bacon's *Essays* were his only popular book. But only ten of them had appeared before 1605. And besides, they are too learned to be read by any but the educated. Even Montaigne, for all his ease and

charm, writes for scholarly gentlemen of a cultivated and reflective habit, men of the world with a turn for study. Cervantes writes for soldiers and courtiers, gentlemen and servants, scholars and merchants, in fact for men, women and children of all ages, conditions and countries. There was nothing to stand between him and any of them : all alike, their ears and their hearts and their minds, were instantly won by his enchanting simplicity. Men, women, and children, I said. Perhaps that point of old and young is worth noticing. Have you ever read *Alice in Wonderland* to children ? If so you will have noticed that, while you and they are both very happy, it is from different things that you get your happiness. They get theirs out of the extravagant incidents, Alice's sudden changes from short to tall and tall to short, the transformation of a baby into a pig or of an old lady into a sheep and the like : you get yours from the fine portrayal of Alice's character, from the wit and brilliance of the dialogues, from the constant felicity of the style, from the humour and wisdom with which the book makes its comment upon human life, winning us at every page at once to laugh more at ourselves and others and to love more too. One book of genius illustrates the writing of another. To give up so rare a thing as Alice to the nursery is to sacrifice a part of it : for though the children get more than they are conscious of getting from the beauty and wisdom of the book, yet there is more in it than they are of age to get. And so with *Don Quixote*. Its incidents are partly childish, and partly governed by the world of chivalrous romance which we have lost and forgotten. Yet to suppose that the book is either fit only for children, or belonged only to the people who knew the books of chivalry, is a complete delusion. It is a book of universal appeal, not one of merely contemporary, merely Spanish, or merely comic interest. Like *Alice*, and of course a thousand times more than *Alice*, it easily transcends the

absurdity of its incidents. By them, as we see, it ought to be a farce. Tilting at windmills, taking inns for castles and country wenches for princesses, these are incidents which belong to farce. Yet the book scarcely ever gives the sensation of farce, which is laughter without love or belief or interest. As we read it we go on getting fonder and fonder of its world and particularly of its two chief actors. The process goes on to the very end. We are happier in the Second Part than in the First, and we never love either the master or the man more than in the very last chapters of all. This is partly due to a quality in Cervantes which has not been common in authors. He was willing to learn from his critics. After all, critics are right now and then; and those who condemned the subsidiary stories which interrupt the main action of Part I of *Don Quixote* had not only the good fortune of being right but the much rarer good fortune of convincing the object of their criticisms. Cervantes inserted no such stories in his Second Part. He also yielded to their objections to the drubbings and indignities inflicted upon Don Quixote in the First Part. It is, I think, a slight exaggeration to say, as Mr. FitzMaurice-Kelly has said, that he moves with unruffled dignity all through the Second Part. But there is no doubt that there are in it extremely few undignified incidents, and that Don Quixote gains in charm, and Sancho in wit, humour and good sense.

Don Quixote is, so far as I know, the oldest European story-book which is still widely read. Perhaps it has a better claim than any other book to be the beginning of the modern novel. Not that there are, strictly speaking, any definite beginnings in literary history. In literature, as in politics, if you dare to say that a new departure dates from such an event or year, a learned man will always find some anticipation of your beginning. Still in both we must find points of departure somewhere. And I think it is substantially true

to say that *Don Quixote* begins the novel of ordinary life. There were collections of stories before. But the novel as we know it, that is, the imaginative treatment of ordinary life in prose as apart from drama and on a considerable scale, makes its first appearance in *Don Quixote*. Certainly the life in it is far from being all ordinary. But in that the book only exhibits the method of all sound progress. It retains something of the very thing which it is its business to supersede. The story which Cervantes inherited was a farrago of sometimes edifying and beautiful but always absurdly improbable adventures: and its characters were more or less heroic persons unlike any human being whom the readers had ever met. He did not set his predecessors and their extravagances aside. What he did was to adopt, caricature, and kill them. Don Quixote attempts, and sometimes believes himself to have accomplished, feats as incredible as those of Amadis of Gaul or Palmerin of England. But note the new thing. He is, what they are not, in the real world and seen in its disillusioning daylight. The consequence is that his exploits are not heroic but ridiculous, and are not believed in either by the other characters in the book or by its readers. And so it killed the books of chivalry by making such exploits ludicrous instead of romantic. And note a more important achievement. While *Don Quixote* killed the old it gave birth to the new. In getting rid of impossible romance it founded the novel of real life. If the niece and the housekeeper, the bachelor and the priest, killed the knight-errants, they began the creation of a long line of human beings of whom the latest born will certainly not prove to be the last. *Don Quixote* is a book of combats with lions, of meetings with giants and princesses and enchanters,

> Of turneys and of trophies hung,
> Of forests and enchantments drear.

But in them 'more is meant than meets the ear'. Not some fantastical religious meaning about the Virgin Mary, not

some cryptic political allegory about the Duke of Medina Sidonia, but the story of human life as it comes out from the placing of these fanciful persons and events in the light of truth. Seen in this way, the very extravagances of Don Quixote, the extraordinary credulity of Sancho Panza, unite with all that we are shown of the sane and healthy personages of the story to give a true picture of human nature, its weakness, its folly, its courage, its beauty, its wisdom, its 'serious faith and inward glee'. It can be grave and sad enough. There are moments when its reader's musing comment might take the form of the Preacher's 'vanity of vanities', or of Burke's words at Bristol 'What shadows we are and what shadows we pursue!' Yes: but there are also moments when the book fills us with a sense of the fineness of the quality of man's nature, a sense of life as a thing infinitely interesting and delightful, and not without some glimpses of the divine: moments in which the note it strikes is not so absurdly out of tune with Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is a man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!'

The quoting of these famous words naturally brings me to what one can hardly avoid to-day, the comparison between the two greatest geniuses of Spain and England, who died, as it were on the same day, three hundred years ago. To compare them is to find more unlikeness than likeness. The first unlikeness is connected with that very fact of their deaths. They died at the same time but not of the same age. Shakespeare was just fifty-two when he died. Cervantes was fifty-seven when he produced the First Part of *Don Quixote*, and sixty-eight when he produced the Second Part, the publication of which he only survived a few months. In that article to which I have already referred Sir Walter Raleigh suggested that, if the question whether we should

rather devote ourselves to Shakespeare or to Cervantes had been one of those put to Sancho in the days of his government, he might have answered : ' read Shakespeare till you are fifty-two and after that read Cervantes ! ' That, as he admits, is rather hard on those who do not live past fifty-two. But it is true, I think, that the special quality of *Don Quixote* is one which appeals particularly to the right sort of old age. For old age to be lived well ripeness is all : the mellowness and sweetness of that which has long experienced both the storms and the sunshine of life. There is a peculiar reasonableness, tolerance, good humour and charity which is the reward of having lived long enough to see how many-coloured a thing life is, how much there is to be said on both sides of most questions, what a soul of goodness there is in things evil, what folly in learning, what weakness in power, what wisdom in folly. Youth sees only its own passions and opinions : can seldom see any place in the world for any faith but its own. It has hardly any notion of the complexities and difficulties and compromises which necessarily beset the path of the enthusiast in a world in which men differ so widely. Youth, in fact, often so nobly idealist, is inevitably narrow and generally intolerant. Old age is often disappointed and cynical ; but, if it has not lost faith and hope, it brings to them an added charity unknown to youth. It has learned at last to say : this is my way of living : but it is not the only way : other ways for other men. For this sort of old age *Don Quixote* is a book of consolation and delight. Even in Shakespeare, who did not live to old age, there is something akin to this temper in the serenity and beauty of the ultimate outlook of his last plays, and particularly of Prospero in *The Tempest*.[1]

[1] Since this lecture was first delivered Mr. Lytton Strachey has questioned the truth of this generally accepted account of the temper of the final plays. He finds them characterized, not merely by a return to unreality and the impossibilities of fairy land, but by exceptionally vicious characters (Cloten, Iachimo, Leontes, Caliban, Antonio, and others),

A greater contrast between the two than that of age is to be found in the fact that Shakespeare is perhaps the greatest of all poets, while Cervantes is scarcely a poet at all, and knew it. In his *Voyage of Parnassus* we find Apollo showing him the glorious figure of True Poesy ; on which his comment is that she had never shown herself to him except in undress. The higher regions of poetry were inconceivable to a man who could write, as Cervantes wrote, a sonnet introductory to a Treatise on Diseases of the Kidney. He has nothing whatever of Shakespeare's infinite depths and heights : and his variety, such as it is, disappears altogether when placed side by side with the inexhaustible versatility of Shakespeare. In spite of some high authorities it seems to me quite impossible to place his genius at all on the same level as that of the greatest men of some other nations, such men as Shakespeare or Dante, for instance. That bold saying which I quoted from Sir Walter Raleigh about ' the wisest and most splendid book in the world ' seems to me to go much too far. I do not understand what he can have meant by ' most splendid '. Wisest may possibly be true if wisdom lie in an easy, natural, kindly, universal humanity. Perhaps the heights and depths are not so available for the uses of every day as the golden mediocrity loved of Horace, who will always have many more readers than Lucretius. It was one of the deepest of English poets who avoided ' moving accidents ' and preferred to set his poetry in

> the very world which is the world
> Of all of us—the place where, in the end,
> We find our happiness or not at all.

And that, in spite of Don Quixote's madness, is where Cervantes takes us and not, as Shakespeare so largely does, to a world outside or above us, far intenser than our own,

which hardly suggest a serene outlook upon life. The answer to this is, I think, that the end of all the crimes in the final plays is not mere death, as in the great tragedies : it is repentance and peace.

to such loves as those of Romeo and Juliet, to such agony as Othello's, to such torment of intellectual and moral crisis as we see in Hamlet. Cervantes never travels to these far countries. The very genius of his book is to set us in the life we know—primarily, of course, the life which he saw about him in Spain, but also the life of all times and countries—and to heighten the sense of that familiar life by placing in it something which is alien to it, a stranger and a pilgrim, a 'pure fool', a Parsifal, what seems madness and slowly reveals itself as having a wisdom of its own above the wisdom of this world. By the creation of Don Quixote Cervantes became indirectly the creator of a long line of loved figures, not one of which would have been what it is if Don Quixote had not been before them: of Bunyan's Pilgrim, of Addison's Sir Roger, of Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield; even, we may almost say, of more recent simplicities like Thackeray's Dobbin and the 'Holy Man' of Mr. Kipling's *Kim*. Of all these, in different degrees, we feel, as we feel of Don Quixote, that, though the world may call them mad, in the end we who read are driven to ask ourselves which is the greater madman, the world which believes only in what its five senses can tell it, or the Don Quixotes and the Charles Primroses, who are so easily taken in by those who use their senses shrewdly, but who see another vision for which the world has no eyes.

That takes us to religion, in which the contrast between Cervantes and Shakespeare is very striking. Of Shakespeare's religion we know almost nothing. Some of us may feel fairly sure that he was not a man either to doubt the importance of religion, or to quit conformity with the church of his country on any small point, or to submit his private opinions altogether to the obedience of any official or ecclesiastical creed. But all that is mere conjecture. The characters in his greatest plays—the scene of Desdemona's death is a partial exception—very rarely speak of the

ultimate issues of life in language which is definitely Christian, still less in the language of any particular Church. The note struck is that of 'Out, out, brief candle' and 'the rest is silence'. But Cervantes is always an orthodox and pious Catholic who loves to take opportunities of using the language of faith and devotion. This may be due to the circumstances in which he wrote, when the power of the Spanish Inquisition was at its height, or to convictions sincerely held, or possibly even to dramatic instinct. For while Hamlet and Lear and the rest may be said not to belong, except for a few externals, to any defined age or country, Don Quixote is most definitely a Spaniard of the time of Philip III. We should feel him to be appreciably less probable if he were not a devout Catholic. Anyhow that is what he is throughout. We find him puzzled by Sancho's argument that it might be more religious to be a friar than a knight-errant. We find him discoursing about the Christian and un-Christian reasons for going to war, and delivering a noble panegyric of four great Saints at the sight of their pictures. And finally, what I cannot but regret, we find him on his deathbed making a pious recantation of his belief in books of chivalry, with a 'Blessed be Almighty God who has vouchsafed me so great a good' as to make me see that books of knight-errantry are fictions.

In all this, in his orthodoxy of temper and in the everydayness of the world in which he lived, Cervantes is far more like Scott than Shakespeare. Indeed there is probably no great writer whom he resembles so much as Scott. Lockhart tells us that 'Scott always expressed the most unbounded admiration for Cervantes, and said that the *novelas* of that author had first inspired him with the ambition of excelling in fiction.' One has no difficulty in imagining his enjoyment of a thing of such fine humour as the *Coloquio de los Perros*, and even of some of the more purely picaresque stories a taste for which is less easy to recover to-day. The

truth is that the temperaments of the two men and their methods as artists are more like than those of any two men of anything like equal genius. Both loved life in all its manifestations, loved adventure, oddity, humour, goodness. Each was a fighter and a patriot. Scott was as proud of his volunteering—all the fighting that his lameness allowed him to do—as Cervantes of Lepanto or Aeschylus of Marathon. But these, we suspect or know, are the only sort of adventures they cared about. For the adventures of the spirit they seem to have had little taste. We cannot imagine either of them to have had in him a Hamlet or a Romeo. They admired the lovers and the heroes and the saints but for themselves they liked the middle way of good sense and kindliness, orthodoxy and prosperity. Both were men who took life in the main as they found it, used it, enjoyed it, went through it laughing and talking, loving and winning love every day of their lives, serving themselves and others in their generation, doing the work that came to their hands generously, valiantly and well. One cannot fancy either of them turning aside to interest himself in problems of pure speculation, least of all in such speculations as might turn the world upside down. Both are utterly unlike the sort of temperament exhibited in Tolstoy's life and Dostoievsky's novels. Theirs is the way of acceptance, not the way of revolt : neither of them would have felt at all inclined to quit the familiar paths of life for any dreamland whether of Plato or of St. Francis or of Rousseau. The visions of the first two they would have thought partly beautiful, but also partly impracticable, and therefore false : in the third, the equal barbarism of Rousseau, they would have seen neither beauty nor truth. Only, I take it, Cervantes had more of the idealist than Scott. Only one who understood something of the idealist temper could have created such a figure as Don Quixote, one side of whom is only to be perfectly understood by the saints.

Cervantes and Scott are also very close to each other in their methods as artists. Not the self-torturing search after perfection of a Flaubert [1] or a Henry James, not the delicate and unerring felicity of a Jane Austen, but a large and easy exuberance, moving like a great river, and like a great river sometimes overflowing its banks and out of its very exuberance producing lifeless floods and flat marshes. Both broke rules and wrote carelessly: each could half accidentally write as noble a prose as the world has seen. There are details of resemblance too. How those prefaces of Cervantes show the way to the mystifications which Scott loved! The supposed Cid Hamete Benengeli and his translator are just what Jedediah Cleishbotham and the rest are: pleasant phantoms enabling the author to talk innocently about his own books and to exhibit that final mark of humour, the gift of laughing at oneself. Nothing, for instance, could be more exactly in the vein which Scott loved than the opening of Chapter XXIV of the Second Part in which the supposed Spanish translator of the supposed Cid Hamete Benegeli apologizes for inserting such extravagances as Don Quixote's account of his adventures in the Cave, and leaves the reader to decide between the improbability of the story and the equal improbability that Don Quixote, 'a knight of the most worth of any of his time,' should have allowed himself to depart from the truth.

There are also differences to be noted. Heine [2] has spoken of the superiority of Cervantes to Scott in his greater possession of the epic spirit. He suggests that Cervantes may have

[1] And yet for all the unlikeness of his method Flaubert, like Scott, was from childhood a passionate lover of *Don Quixote*. We find him writing (*Correspondance*, II, 148): 'ce qu'il y a de prodigieux dans Don Quichotte c'est l'absence d'art, et cette perpétuelle fusion de l'illusion et de la réalité qui en fait un livre si comique et si poétique. Quels nains que tous les autres à côté! Comme on se sent petit, mon Dieu!'

[2] I have to thank Mr. Hewitt of Nottingham University for drawing my attention to Heine's essay, which is to be found in Vol. XII of his works.

owed that great 'epic peace of the soul which floats like a heaven of crystal over all his gay pictures of life' to the serenely assured outlook which he owed to his Catholicism, and which was inevitably lacking in Scott who belonged to a race which has long made religion a matter of argument and dispute. There is, I think, some truth in this: though Scott seldom gives the impression of being much ruffled by the disputes he describes: and he was, I should fancy, at least as happy a man as Cervantes. A more indisputable difference between the two is the extent of their creative range. There is no doubt of the greatness of Scott's creations. But the remarkable thing about them is less the single greatness of any one than their astonishing numbers and variety. Cervantes, on the other hand, lives mainly by two figures. But each is absolutely supreme in its kind. The whole range of fiction knows no such gentleman as Don Quixote, no such servant as Sancho Panza.

I have not said much of Sancho, and yet it is quite possible that Scott cared at least as much for the man as for the master. And Cervantes himself makes the priest say: 'the madness of the master would not be worth a farthing without the follies of the man'. So too Don Quixote, when discussing the First Part of the history, says that 'the most difficult character in comedy is that of the fool and he must be no simpleton who plays that part'. Certainly it was no simpleton who created Sancho. Observe the skill of the central conception. Sancho would not have been half so delightful as he is if he had either wholly believed or wholly disbelieved in Don Quixote. As it is, he wholly disbelieves where the things asserted are things that belong to his own world: he knows that the basin is not a helmet nor Dulcinea a princess. But he is simple enough where his interest unites with his ignorance, as in the affair of the island. And one hardly knows whether his ignorance and simplicity are less necessary to the story than

his shrewdness and commonsense. The torrent of his proverbs, against which Don Quixote is always protesting, may be said to belong to both. It is no rare, subtle or learned view of life that they represent, it is the view taken by the plain man. And no novel which leaves that out will achieve immortality. For the business of the novel is that ancient holding the mirror up to life ; a magnifying mirror, no doubt, as Flaubert said, but still a mirror. Even books that are not novels need something of that. We cannot keep long away from the life that we know. It is the limitation of some of the greatest writers in the world—Marcus Aurelius, for instance, and still more the author of *The Imitation*—that they keep us too continuously and too far away. We need them and their like : we need to be stimulated, strengthened, chastened, purified, by them. But we cannot live permanently in an atmosphere so inhumanly rarified. We feel that this bodily life of ours is and ought to be a more genial and enjoyable thing than such writers either depict or desire : and we turn again to Homer and Shakespeare and Scott and Cervantes, where our own life, as we know it, is touched to a greater happiness, beauty, and goodness, not denied or destroyed.

That seems to me the defect of the novelist who is perhaps the greatest of the moderns—Dostoievsky. No novelist. I suppose, has ever given the life of the spirit as he gives it : and the *Brothers Karamasov* may in that way have some claim to be the greatest novel in the world. None that I know gives us so visible a presence of the divine in human life. But human life is not all divine and we are not all spirit. Can we be satisfied by a picture of life which gives us the two extremes, those of the spirituality of the spirit and of the brutality of the body, but very little of the human harmony of body, mind and soul, of happiness, good sense and good conduct, which Greece and Rome taught to the Western nations and which the Western Church itself has

not altogether disdained or repudiated ? It was a Catholic writer, who lived much in Russia, who said : ' recherchons tout ce qui peut donner de la grâce, de la gaieté, du bonheur dans la vie. . . . La gaieté clarifie l'esprit, surtout la gaieté littéraire.' After all, we of the West are not Orientals and have no wish to be : and we cannot be perfectly content with a book which has in it so little of the natural man and seems to alternate between the violence of virtue and the violence of vice. We cannot but ask for a little more of the golden middle, some of the natural man's innocent gaiety and content with his lot as it has come to him : even for some pleasures of the mind to be set by the side of all this fierceness of the soul and body. And so we turn back from it to Molière or Dickens or *Don Quixote* : or even, as I myself actually did when I laid the book down, to the intellectual delights of the autobiography of Gibbon. From Dostoievsky to Gibbon is a very long journey, but when the spirit of reaction seizes us we must expect long journeys. Only with the true classics reaction has nothing to do. It is extravagance, eccentricity, violence, that provoke reaction, and they are just the things which the classics avoid. The note of the classic is centrality and sanity. Homer, Sophocles, Horace, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Molière, Scott : none of these were cranky men. If the Slav wishes to be of their company he must learn to add some geniality and commonsense to his heights and depths, to be healthier and more Catholic in his savour of life.

[1] That, at any rate, is the point of view from which I have been trying to present Cervantes to you. It is as a classical masterpiece that I have spoken of *Don Quixote*. The aspects of the book to which I have chiefly aimed at drawing attention are its relations to life and to its fellow-classics. It is those relations—relations both of substance and form—

[1] This conclusion of the lecture was added when I delivered it before a meeting of the English Association at Nottingham in 1922.

which lift the classics above the common herd of books, in which we find little or no connexion with what is permanent either in life or in literature. I do not think such relations need be imperceptible to those of you who know even less Spanish than I do : any more than they are imperceptible to the English readers of Plato or the Bible. It is best, of course, if we can, to know Hebrew and Greek and Spanish. But, with or without the original languages, it is good to know all we can of the classics. We never, I think, needed them more than now. The tremendous years through which we have been living, the grave ordeal through which we have been passing, and are still passing, make us run a risk of imagining that some kind of intellectual and spiritual earthquake has taken place since 1914, and has let in a dividing gulf of sea, cutting in halves the continuous current of human history, so that we of to-day who are on one side of the gulf are altogether separated from the men of yesterday, and all previous yesterdays, who are on the other side. But that is not so. It is only the perpetual illusion of people who live in a time of very great events. Great events change men, of course. But they never really break the continuity of life. At least, if and when they do, as after the fall of the Western Empire, it is a disaster of the first magnitude to humanity. We at least, who are conscious of owing so much to the great tradition of civilization, must feel that to be cut off from the past would be a horror of black darkness and desolation. Against such a fate there is no better safeguard than the reading of the great books which show us man as he was a hundred or a thousand years ago and as he still is to-day. For the precise mission of the classics is just that : to give us a sense of the indestructible continuity of human life. What is most classical in Hebrew literature or Greek is not what belonged to a particular century or a particular race of men. It is what proves that, in spite, as we hope, of progress and purification as the ages

pass over it, this old human nature of ours never can altogether disdain its ancestors or fail to perceive that it is their descendant. We grow and change, invent new mechanisms and even discover new truths. But the stuff and stock is still the same, and David's grief for Absalom, and Priam's for Hector, are as real to us to-day as they can have been to their first readers. So with Cervantes. When we read him we soon pass behind the outward appearances and come to feel that we are in no strange country, but in one which is our own. We recognize, perhaps claim, some at least occasional kinship with the saintly follies of Don Quixote, and some more frequent with the simple follies of Sancho Panza. We love them both ; and the priest and the bachelor and the rest with them ; and ourselves in them all. After all we are spirit, mind, and body too : and no true classic can be made out of one apart from the others. The greatness of the great novel of Cervantes lies just there : that it has in it the whole of our human nature, a whole which transcends the differences of time and nationality ; and that it is therefore in the strictest sense a classic, which is by definition a book at once universal and immortal.

A MISTAKEN VIEW OF WORDSWORTH

Mr. Harper's Life of Wordsworth is the first which has been written by a man in possession of all the facts and able to use them freely and openly.[1] The poet's nephew wrote his Memoir, perhaps, from still fuller knowledge, but was inevitably prevented by relationship and other considerations from giving all he knew to the public. Frederick Myers's admirable little book is a study, not a biography. M. Émile Legouis's *Jeunesse de Wordsworth* is excellent so far as it goes, but it deals with only twenty-eight of the eighty years of the poet's life. The only regular Biography is that by Professor Knight which is not well put together, is somewhat inaccurate, and is very far from covering the whole ground.

The field was therefore still open for a final Life of Wordsworth ; and it is not much to our credit that it has been left to an American to make the first serious attempt to occupy it. Professor Harper has had great advantages. He has been allowed by the poet's grandson not only to see but to publish much unprinted material, and has received his advice and assistance. He has also been allowed by Mr. Frank Marshall to print a good many new letters of Dorothy Wordsworth, which have the power and charm of everything written by that true woman of genius. The result is a much fuller account than any previous book has given of the generally known facts of Wordsworth's life and character, and a few discoveries of importance, the most surprising of which is the fact, which has amused the profane,

[1] *William Wordsworth. His Life, Works and Influence.* By Prof. G. M. Harper. Two vols. Murray, 1916. This article, or most of it, originally appeared as a review of Professor Harper's book, in the *Quarterly Review* for July, 1916.

that Wordsworth had a natural daughter by a French woman whom he knew in his Revolutionary days. This long-concealed story has of course given some pleasure to the many people who have been exasperated by the elderly Wordsworth's open and tactless consciousness of his own virtues. But the faithful need have no fears. The story of Annette and her daughter Caroline (of whom, and not of Dorothy, the poet was thinking when he wrote the line

Dear child, dear girl, that walkest with me here,)

redounds as a whole very greatly to Wordsworth's honour. What is striking in it is not the fact of a young poet in a foreign country, away from all the restraints of home and family, falling into a connexion of this sort, especially as it appears it was not his fault that it did not lead to marriage. It is rather the fact that he never tried to escape, as he so easily could have done, from the responsibility in which it had involved him. He put himself to the pain of revealing the truth to his sister and afterwards to his wife ; he and they kept up communications with both mother and daughter, and took an active interest in the latter's marriage ; and, when he was fifty and already justly exalted as much by his virtues as by his genius to a peculiar pedestal of honour and even reverence, he took his wife and sister and his disciple Crabb Robinson to see both ladies at Paris. So let the cynics and Bohemians, who always hasten to rejoice at any discovery of vice or weakness in better men than themselves, pause before they assume that this story delivers Wordsworth into their hands. It does not. Taken as a whole, it is a story, not of vice but of virtue ; not of weakness but of strength.[1]

This discovery is the most striking novelty in Mr. Harper's book. For the rest it tells the familiar story with greater detail and accuracy than it has ever been told before. It

[1] See Appendix A at the end of this essay.

is much the best Life of Wordsworth in existence. But the final Life it cannot be. The chance of writing that Mr. Harper has missed, partly by lack of sympathy and partly by lack of ability. He is in the first place a mediocre writer. His style lacks force and clearness as well as any kind of distinction. It is respectable but never anything more. Or, as that is an epithet which Mr. Harper particularly dislikes and generally misunderstands, let us call it pedestrian ; and it is often somewhat shuffling and shambling at that. He uses pronouns, for instance, very loosely, and one is not always sure to whom they refer. He is capable of such perverse pedantries as calling Brunswick ' Braunschweig '. One might as reasonably speak of St. John as St. Joannes. There is also a lack of lucidity in his arrangement of his material. He is, for instance, much concerned to assert that *The Prelude*, as we have it, is not the poem as it was originally written ; and the point is one of interest and importance. But Mr. Harper's method of dealing with it is extraordinary. He repeats the assertion over and over again, to the irritation of the reader who asks for some evidence for it. But he gives no proof, and even in one place implies that he has none to give. ' It is not known ', he says once, ' whether *The Prelude* was not considerably retouched before Wordsworth's death.' Yet all the while he had the proof which he would not give. A letter of Miss Fenwick's written in 1839 speaks of the poet as working for six or seven hours a day at the ' revising of his grand autobiographical poem '. This may not prove all that Mr. Harper asserts, but it does show that *The Prelude*, as we have it, is not precisely the poem read to Coleridge in January 1807 ; and, if Mr. Harper had quoted it at once instead of at the very end of his book, he would have saved himself some trouble and his readers some irritation.[1]

Another reason why this cannot be the final Life of

[1] See Appendix B at the end of this essay.

Wordsworth is its author's weakness on the side of criticism. No poetry has exercised so much influence on subsequent poets as that of Wordsworth. It is, therefore, in his case more than usually important to understand exactly where his strength and his weakness as a poet lie. How absolutely unfit Mr. Harper is for the performance of this difficult task is sufficiently seen by the fact that the two qualities in which he again and again declares Wordsworth to have been pre-eminent are 'consummate technical skill' and 'versatility', the exact points in which he stands conspicuously below all our other great poets. Mr. Harper positively declares that in all Wordsworth's works both of verse and of prose, with the single exception of *The Excursion*, he exhibits 'artistic finish' and 'the true artist's instinct for design'. He frequently selects very ordinary poems for high praise, as when he strangely declares that the lines beginning 'Life with yon lambs' are 'one of Wordsworth's best poems'; and he is once at least capable of a serious misinterpretation of a very well-known poem, as when he asserts that 'piety', in the famous lines on the rainbow 'My heart leaps up', is 'used in its original sense of reverence for filial obligation'. To say this is, of course, to miss the whole idea of the poem, one of the central ideas of Wordsworth's philosophy. It is not the piety of the grown man towards the memories of his own childhood which he is only or chiefly thinking of. He is thinking of another and still older piety, that 'natural piety' which makes and has always made the heart of man leap with wonder, joy or fear when he beholds the 'rainbow in the sky'; and it is that sort of piety which he hopes will bind together his youth and age and without which he would prefer to die.

After such blunders as these in his own special subject, one is not surprised at finding Mr. Harper class Milton, Waller, Dryden, and Pope together as poets who all wrote in the 'academic manner'; and one merely smiles at such

an ineptitude as his calling Crabb Robinson 'the Pepys of that generation'. It is easier to explain his indignation with Wordsworth for alluding to angels in some of his poems and his confident assertion that the 'date of these beings is out'; or even his strange denunciation of the Sonnet 'Retirement' as 'thoroughly immoral, as bad as the work of any Epicurean poet of the Roman decadence'. For anti-religious, as well as religious, intolerance has always blundered over the criticism of poetry which is out of the reach of either. If 'Retirement' is immoral, so is the whole of that very 'decadent and Epicurean' poet Cowper; and, if it was wicked of Wordsworth to talk of angels even in a metaphor, what is to be said of the unorthodox Shelley's 'angels of rain and lightning' and its thousand parallels?

The truth apparently is that the natural bent of Mr. Harper's mind is not towards art or poetry at all. It is towards ethics and, above all, towards politics. Of any disinterested enjoyment of poetry in itself there is scarcely a hint in all his nine hundred pages. The reason why he likes Wordsworth's reforms in the subjects and language of poetry is that he considers them democratic reforms abolishing the fashionable exclusiveness of previous poetry. The reason why he dislikes the poetry of Wordsworth's middle-age is not that much of it is commonplace but that none of it is revolutionary. The Wordsworth in whom he is interested is the young man who went to France and threw himself into the Revolutionary cause. No doubt that period is profoundly important in Wordsworth's life. But there does not appear to be any foundation for Mr. Harper's notion that without it he would never have been a great poet. On the contrary, the elements which afterwards united and expressed themselves in his poetry—including his profound sympathy with peasants and humble folk generally—were conspicuous in his boyhood; and the per-

manent and poetic part of them owes far more to Hawkshead than to Paris. He wrote no great poetry in France; indeed, he wrote none after his return till the storm of revolutionary excitement had to a large extent settled down. And that storm was neither so violent nor so lasting as Mr. Harper constantly asserts. His view is that Wordsworth's 'state of mind' about 'distinctions of high and low' was 'a result of his conversion to the equalitarian creed of the French Revolution'. He imagines the second visit to France and the friendship with Beaupuy to have been the most important events in the poet's life. He pictures Wordsworth as becoming a new man under their influence, a passionate politician of the French revolutionary type, a child of *The Enlightenment*, living for a creed of social and political abstractions, a doctrinaire in politics, a free-thinker in religion. And he supposes this mood to have lasted more or less for some years after the return to England. He even declares that during all the earlier part of Wordsworth's life, apparently up to Waterloo, his 'chief interest was political'.

Now, a fraction of this is true, of course, but so little that the portrait as a whole is a mere caricature. Mr. Harper can be refuted out of his own pages. Wordsworth's letters from France show none of this enthusiasm. They confirm his later statement in *The Prelude* that he was often a little bored with Beaupuy's political harangue. The ninth book of *The Prelude* shows him discoursing to Beaupuy about 'the end of civil government' in the very spirit of Burke, and confessing that when he visited the site of the Bastille he affected more emotion than he felt. So in a long letter, written in May 1792 and printed by Mr. Harper, he shows no political enthusiasm, and congratulates his correspondent on having been born in England, 'a free country where talents are more liberally rewarded than amongst any other nation'. At Orleans, in the autumn, he is more occupied

with limestone springs than with politics. And all the while the alleged free-thinker is contemplating taking orders on his return to England !

The truth is that to politics as understood by the French Revolutionists at the time, and by Mr. Harper and Radical politicians ever since, Wordsworth never gave the heart of his being at all, and gave what he did give only for a short time. Mr. Harper wants us to believe that Wordsworth was in fact much occupied with politics during the great days at Alfoxden. But there is no evidence for this theory ; and Coleridge expressly states the contrary. Unfortunately, Mr. Harper writes throughout in the interest of political, social and religious reform as advocated by the Encyclopaedists in France and by their followers, especially Godwin, in England, and insists on treating Wordsworth first as the champion and then as the apostate of this movement. The truth is that the essential Wordsworth never was either the one or the other. As Mr. Knight well says, he never sympathized with the formal or ' rational ' system of democratic thought. What he did sympathize with, while in France and after his return, was a different thing, the ' glad uprise ' of the suppressed instinct of freedom, and its outcome,

Joy in widest commonalty spread.

And with this he continued to sympathize, with the cooler fervour of middle and old age, throughout the rest of his life. Whenever he is a poet he is neither revolutionary nor reactionary but something much deeper than either. No doubt his opinions about political measures changed greatly in course of time ; but those convictions about the essential qualities of the human spirit which are at the root of all his poetry remained substantially unaltered. What he wrote to Charles Fox in 1802 was what he had felt before he ever saw France and what he still felt in his last years. He was scorned for choosing ' low ' subjects. His defence is that he hoped

by his poems to 'enlarge our feeling of reverence for our species and our knowledge of human nature by showing that our best qualities are possessed by men whom we are too apt to consider, not with reference to the points in which they resemble us, but to those in which they manifestly differ from us'. That is to say that when he wrote of poor men he was not thinking of their poverty, but of their humanity; not of their material privations or political rights, but of the hopes and fears and loves and passions which fill them simply as men.

It is of course quite true that Wordsworth was a Radical in his youth and a Tory in his old age. But the truth is that neither his youthful Radicalism nor his elderly Toryism affected very much more than the outskirts of his mind. The essential Wordsworth, the Wordsworth who wrote great poetry and who lives, was not a great deal affected by either. There is a story of Carlyle speaking of himself and a friend with whom he had been having a discussion as 'except in opinion, not disagreeing'. That is the limit of the disagreement between the Wordsworth of 1792 and the Wordsworth of 1832. How small and unessential a part of the man was concerned in the 'opinions' of either period may be seen by the utterances they produced. Where does Mr. Harper have to go when he wants to illustrate the extent of Wordsworth's belief in the social, moral, and political theories of Godwin? To the pamphlet attacking Bishop Watson, the least original, the least imaginative, the least passionate of Wordsworth's productions. Where does he have to go to prove the extreme Toryism of the poet's age? To querulous letters and dull poems which might have been written by any other respectable and panic-stricken old gentleman between 1830 and 1840. Neither the one nor the other came from the centre at all. When the real Wordsworth speaks, whether in youth or old age, it is in the language of faith and passion. And in his use of that

language the change between 1792 and 1832 is not so much one of sympathy as one of power.

Of this Wordsworth, of the poet who saw more, believed more, loved more than other men, it is simply untrue to say, as Mr. Harper says, that 'in the second half of his life he cursed what he once blessed and blessed what he once cursed'. The truth of that saying is entirely confined to the contrast between the writer who complacently echoed political theorists in his youth and the writer who ill-temperedly echoed frightened property owners later on. A poet, or indeed any author, may fairly claim to be judged by what is unique and his own, and not by what is commonplace, in his writings. Tried by that test, Wordsworth cannot be said to have deserted a cause which he never embraced. What moved him in the French Revolution was not its abstract theories but its passion of life, its energy of love and hope and faith in the future of man. And never, even in any of his prose, or any of it that counts, did he renounce that sympathy. After all, which of his prose writings do count? Those in which the unique soul of the man is visibly present; those in which that heart, at once so fiery and so tender, that inward eye of spiritual vision which saw, as perhaps no other man ever saw, into the life both of man and of Nature, make themselves plainly heard in passionate and musical language such as no mere opinions ever found for themselves. And that means the Cintra Tract, the Prefaces, the Letter to Wilson, the Essay upon Epitaphs, the Letter to a Friend of Robert Burns. But it does not mean the reply to Bishop Watson, a mere piece of Radical polemics, nor its Tory counterpart, the Address to the Freeholders of Westmorland. It is the same with the poetry. Whenever Wordsworth is a true poet, whether in age or youth, he rejoices in the free, loving, wise, passionate, spirit of man; and though Nature, as he himself tells us, had 'tamed' him, and led him, as she leads

her turbulent streams, down from life's mountains to its quiet meadows, yet he has not forgotten his

> desperate course of tumult and of glee,

and is still pleased, 'more than a wise man ought to be', when he reads 'a tale Of two brave vessels matched in deadly fight And fighting to the death'. And, though age cannot be youth, and already at thirty-seven he is turning from the nightingale's 'fiery heart' and 'tumultuous harmony' to prefer the stockdove's song,

> Slow to begin, and never ending;
> Of serious faith and inward glee;
> That was the song—the song for me!

yet the 'glee' remained, if now more inward than outward; and so did the poet's faith in the heart of man as a thing possessing a life utterly above and beyond the limitations of wealth or earthly conditions. He could no longer often express it as he had once, and it had become oftener 'serious' and 'pensive' than 'tumultuous' and 'fierce'; but it was still in him. *The Leech-Gatherer* and *The Cumberland Beggar* are far greater poems than that about the Old Man and the Robin written in 1846; but the unique Wordsworthian sympathy with the heart of the poor is as plain in this as in its greater predecessors. It is in 1845 that the venerable Tory breaks out in praise of the 'equal rights and simple honesty' of the early Pennsylvanians; and it is in one of the last Fenwick Notes, so constantly, ungratefully, and unjustly belittled by Mr. Harper (what would we not give for similar notes by Shelley, even if written by an elderly Shelley who had ceased to believe that all the ills of the world come from the crimes of priests and kings?), that the poet, breaking out, as so often, against the inhumanity of the factory system, cries, 'Oh for the reign of justice, and then the humblest man among us would have more power and dignity in and about him than the highest have now!'

There are one or two partial and transient recognitions in Mr. Harper of this essential unity of spirit which lay deep under Wordsworth's superficial changes of opinion. But it did not suit him to give more ; and his book loses by its emphasis being laid not on the important but on the unimportant. The fact that Wordsworth was for a very few years a republican cannot justify a man in turning his Life into a book of republican propaganda, any more than the fact that Gladstone was for a short time a strong Conservative would justify any one who should make his biography a continuous attack upon Victorian Liberalism. But that is substantially what Mr. Harper has done. His book is far fuller of politics than of poetry ; and it is not, and never will be, of politics that wise men will chiefly think when they hear the name of Wordsworth.

Yet Wordsworth disputes with Shakespeare and Milton the glory of being the greatest political name in the long line of our poets. There is, perhaps, in Shelley a finer purity of political passion than in any of the three ; but Shelley's vision was set on changeless ideas and abstractions and not on those temporary, local, partial, and changing embodiments of ideas which are the stuff of politics. The real Europe, the real Greece, Rome, England, he could not see, as those others, and notably Wordsworth, could and did. Wordsworth went through a period when, as we have seen, under the influence of the French Revolution he approached politics from this side of abstractions. And it is this moment in his life on which Mr. Harper lays all his stress. But what is notable about it is that it produced little or no great poetry dealing with political subjects. That came later, when he had seen the cause of Liberty embodied in the struggle of his own country against the lawless despotism of Napoleon. And when we speak of him as a political poet, it is necessarily of this period that we chiefly think, because it and it alone produced great poetry. Yet of this poetry

Mr. Harper scarcely speaks at all. Eight or ten of his nine hundred pages are all that he gives to it. And these contain at least one strange impertinence :

'I attach only the smallest consequence', says Mr. Harper, speaking of *The Happy Warrior*, 'to the note appended to the poem in the edition of 1807 stating that the death of Lord Nelson "directed the Author's thoughts to the subject", even though it is supported by a long Fenwick Note to the same effect, and by a letter from Southey to Scott, dated February 4, 1806' (ii. 119).

Was there ever a more arrogant defiance of unpalatable truth? Mr. Harper does not like war or its heroes; he does not wish to admit that Wordsworth paid honour to Nelson; and therefore neither the express, contemporary and public declaration of the poet himself, confirmed though it be by a note dictated in his old age, nor the equally contemporary evidence of a letter written by Southey to Scott, who, after all, were not only both Wordsworth's friends but both poets, is to be held of any consequence whatever when weighed in the balance against Mr. Harper's prejudices!

It may be as well that Mr. Harper leaves this side of Wordsworth alone, for his total lack of sympathy with it would have made any chapter he might have written on it a predestined failure. Perhaps the war has opened his eyes, as it has opened the eyes of so many, to the sacred duty laid upon the free to repel the enemies of freedom with all their strength and at the cost, if need be, of their lives. But when he wrote this book he was perfectly blind to all that, and a bitter enemy of the mildest exhibitions of a warlike spirit. In October 1803, when an invasion was expected, Dorothy Wordsworth wrote to Mrs. Clarkson that the poet had become a volunteer, and that 'surely there never was a more determined hater of the French, nor one more willing to do his utmost to destroy them if they really do come'. Most lovers of Wordsworth will be proud both

of the act and of the feeling which inspired it. But Mr. Harper considers it 'odious to see him in a bloodthirsty mood!'

The truth is that Mr. Harper, at least when he has a pen in his hand, is a Godwinian rationalist to whom emotion is anathema, to whom any one man is as important as another, for whom 'social virtue consists, not in the love of this or the other individual, but in the love of man'. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was a complete human being, feeling as well as thinking, willingly yielding to local and personal attachments, and making no pretence that his brother was not more to him than another man, or England than France. He said some of the hardest words that have ever been said of England, and he could even rejoice in her defeat when he believed her to be fighting in an unholy cause. But his joy was never that of the abstract and cosmopolitan rationalist. It was a joy mixed with an agony of pain; the joy of a man who goes to the scaffold for his country, or, more nearly, of one who changes his faith, knowing that in doing so he stabs the mother whom he loves to the heart. The misery that Wordsworth suffered between 1793 and 1795 or 1796 was that of a tragic struggle between his heart and his mind. For the moment, the thoughts mastered the feelings; and with silent despair in his heart he tried to live in the belief that an abstract liberty, equality and fraternity could take for men the place of the old humanities of father, son and brother, friend and lover and fellow-countryman. As he himself tells us in *The Prelude*, he

> Zealously laboured to cut off [his] heart
> From all the sources of her former strength;

he believed and hoped that

> future times would surely see
> The man to come parted, as by a gulph,
> From him who had been.

That is, at the bidding, as he says, of 'syllogistic words' he gave up all hold on reality and in particular on the two ideas of continuity and locality or nationality which are the very foundation of the art of politics. The heart of man will not endure to be cut off 'from all the sources of her strength'; if it is so cut off, it dies. So Wordsworth found, as he tossed in a sea of insoluble questions, from which he was only rescued, first by devoting his faculty of pure reasoning to its proper sphere—that world of abstract science where 'disturbances of human will and power . . . find no admission'—and then by listening to old influences that had moved his heart from childhood, and above all to his sister Dorothy and to Nature, who led him back

To those sweet counsels between head and heart

from which alone grows 'genuine knowledge fraught with peace'.

The story has often been told; never so well, after the poet's own account, as by M. Legouis in his admirable *Jeunesse de Wordsworth*. There is nothing better in his book than the chapter in which he shows the progress of Wordsworth's deliverance from Godwin's intellectual abstractions according to which it was absurd to pretend that 'an honest ploughman' could be 'as virtuous as Cato'. Abstract man gradually faded from the poet's mind; and man as he is attracted his interest instead. And, as he closely watched the poor about him and saw how much inherited customs and memories and affections meant to them, he gradually restored to the real man, as M. Legouis says, 'one by one, the feelings of which ideal man had been stripped by Godwin'. And so, mind and heart consenting together, great poetry came from him. But not yet great political poetry. For in that field mind and heart did not yet consent together. So long as the mind judged that France was fighting for, and England against, the cause

of liberty and justice, while the heart remained as intensely English as it always was from his first day to his last, great poetry, which demands the union of mind and heart, could not come from Wordsworth.

The change began to come in 1798, when the French first attacked Switzerland. The next year Napoleon became First Consul. But it was not till 1802 that the great political poetry began. In that year Napoleon became First Consul for life; and France openly ceased to be a free country. In that year Napoleon sent Ney into Switzerland and assumed the attitude of a lord paramount of that country, which was to lead to graver interferences later on. In that year also Wordsworth renewed his interest in politics by visiting France during the peace. When he landed at Calais, he wrote the Sonnet 'Fair Star of Evening', with which Mr. Acland opens his useful and excellently edited little volume of Patriotic Poems. The poet looked across to England:

> There! that dusky spot
> Beneath thee, that is England; there she lies.
> Blessings be on you both! One hope, one lot,
> One life, one glory! I, with many a fear
> For my dear Country, many heartfelt sighs,
> Among men who do not love her, linger here.

While there, he denounced the crowd of English whom he saw hurrying 'to bend the knee In France, before the new-born Majesty', and declared that 'truth', 'sense', and 'liberty' were flown from the new France. A week or two later he was at Dover again. His heart beat high at all he saw; for all was England and all was free. The two loves were now one.

> Here, on our native soil, we breathe once more.
> The cock that crows, the smoke that curls, that sound
> Of bells; those boys who in yon meadow-ground
> In white-sleeved shirts are playing; and the roar
> Of the waves breaking on the chalky shore;—

All, all are English. Oft have I looked round
With joy in Kent's green vales ; but never found
Myself so satisfied in heart before.
Europe is yet in bonds ; but let that pass,
Thought for another moment. Thou art free,
My Country ! and 'tis joy enough and pride
For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass
Of England once again, and hear and see,
With such a dear Companion at my side.

The unity of mind and heart was attained, the choice taken ; and now the political poetry could begin.

A few weeks ago,[1] at a conference of the English Association, a bookseller was telling his audience that one of the effects of the war was an increased sale of poetry, and especially of the poetry of Wordsworth. There can be no doubt, as indeed he said, that this is partly due to Mr. Acland's little book,[2] with its interesting introduction and the excellent historical notes which face the poems on the opposite pages, an arrangement as convenient and pleasant as it is original. But it must also be due to the peculiar nature of Wordsworth's patriotic poetry. It is not too much to say that it reads as if it were written for us to-day. Splendid as are Shakespeare's outbursts in *Henry the Fifth* and *King John*, we cannot quite feel *that* of them. The wars he had to deal with were mere duels of nations, in which the interest we take is simply a pride in seeing the victory of our own. Except the fighting itself there is nothing great about them, no cause, no idea, nothing of the universal soul of man. But in this war—far more even than in the great struggle with Napoleon—everything great in life seems to be at stake. And it is natural, it is even inevitable that we should go back for comfort and courage in it to the poet who could not sound the trumpet till he could put his faith and vision into the blast it was to give—the poet who

[1] Written in the spring of 1916.

[2] *The Patriotic Poetry of William Wordsworth. A Selection (with Introduction and Notes).* By Right Hon. A. H. D. Acland. Clarendon Press, 1915.

cried, as he looked on the narrow waters that lie between England and France :

> Winds blow, and waters roll,
> Strength to the brave, and Power, and Deity,
> Yet in themselves are nothing ! One decree
> Spake laws to *them*, and said that by the soul
> Only, the Nations shall be great and free.

These were not mere phrases in Wordsworth's mouth. He meant every syllable of them. It was the very core of his faith that, if we will let her, Nature strengthens and purifies our soul ; and that the only kind of greatness worth having is that of the soul. That is the key to his attitude all through these years ; and it is what lifts his message far above its immediate occasion. He has nothing to recant. He never changed his view that the original war against the French Republic was a sin against the light. But when once France had, as he believed, given her soul away, when she had betrayed the cause of freedom and sold her honour to a despot for a blare of victorious trumpets, he had no doubt at all on which side the spiritual hopes of the world lay. He is never a mere patriot, of the ' my country right or wrong ' type ; he never blinds his eyes to England's faults, about which his Sonnets use harder words than they ever use about her enemy :

> Rapine, avarice, expense,
> This is idolatry ; and these we adore :
> Plain living and high thinking are no more :
> The homely beauty of the good old cause
> Is gone ; our peace, our fearful innocence,
> And pure religion breathing household laws.

Yet, in spite of all,

> It is not to be thought of that the flood
> Of British freedom, which, to the open sea
> Of the world's praise, from dark antiquity,
> Hath flowed, with pomp of waters unwithstood—
> Roused though it be full often to a mood
> Which spurns the check of salutary bands—

That this most famous stream in bogs and sands
Should perish, and to evil and to good
Be lost for ever ;

and, though Englishmen change swords for ledgers, his faith and love are stronger than his fears :

when I think of thee, and what thou art,
Verily, in the bottom of my heart,
Of those unfilial fears I am ashamed.
For dearly must we prize thee ; we who find
In thee a bulwark for the cause of men ;
And I by my affection was beguiled :
What wonder if a Poet now and then,
Among the many movements of his mind,
Felt for thee as a lover or a child !

It is only because England, and only so far as England, is 'a bulwark for the cause of men' that he can put his whole self, mind, and heart, and soul, into the struggle. All through, the appeal of his Sonnets is a spiritual appeal, more than worthy of Milton whose Sonnets, read to him by his sister in May 1802, were his immediate inspiration. The thing that moved him was what moves the best men to-day—the great issue between a universal despotism, alien, lawless, the mere creature of force, and the liberties of the European nations, whether inherited from the past or to be won from the future. That made the Swiss question, which produced what is perhaps the finest of all the Sonnets, so decisive for him :

Two Voices are there ; one is of the Sea,
One of the Mountains ; each a mighty Voice :
In both from age to age thou didst rejoice ;
They were thy chosen music, Liberty !
There came a Tyrant, and with holy glee
Thou fought'st against him, but hast vainly striven ;
Thou from thy Alpine holds at length art driven,
Where not a torrent murmurs heard by thee.
Of one deep bliss thine ear hath been bereft ;
Then cleave, O cleave, to that which still is left ;
For, high-souled Maid, what sorrow would it be
That Mountain floods should thunder as before,

> And Ocean bellow from his rocky shore,
> And neither awful Voice be heard by thee!

And that is what makes the greatness of his pamphlet on the Convention of Cintra. He saw, what so few of the statesmen saw, that this alliance with the peoples of Spain and Portugal had a hope in it, because it had a spiritual value in it, which the subsidizing treaties with Continental sovereigns could not have. In his view the Continental alliances might or might not be prudent expedients; the Spanish war was a thing of a higher order altogether, not an expedient but an act of principle; something into which faith and hope could throw themselves with a vision of new life. And the result proved that it was he and not the statesmen who were right. So soon as the Allies began to build on the principle of nationality, the end began to be in sight. What defeated Napoleon was not the resolve of the sovereigns to retain their property, but the resolve of England to be England, of Spain to be Spain, of Germany to be Germany, of Russia to be Russia. And it is scarcely too much to say, as Mr. Dicey has lately said in his interesting Introduction to a reprint of Wordsworth's Tract, that the policy of England has been 'markedly successful so far as it has coincided with the statesmanship of Wordsworth', whom he calls 'the first of English Nationalists', and not very successful so far as it has followed other lines.

To-day we are engaged in what we hope is the supreme phase of the old struggle against the efforts of a military tyranny to erect its single power upon the ruins of the separate nations of Europe. And for some of us it is not the least happy of our auguries of steadfast faith and ultimate victory that we are fighting under the guidance of a Foreign Minister who is known to be what Mr. Acland calls him, 'a lifelong lover of Wordsworth'. We go back to Wordsworth because our position is so like his. And, if our position is so like, we must remember that so also are our duties. What did he insist upon through all those awful

years when England stood, often without an ally, against the greatest military genius the world has ever seen? First of all on perseverance. 'We ought not to make peace with France on any account', he wrote, 'till she is humiliated and her power brought within reasonable bounds.' That is strong language, but the man who called Carnage 'God's daughter' was no mincer of phrases. He was a poet, and he need not be interpreted as if he were writing a scientific treatise. But he meant, and all that is wisest and strongest in England means to-day, that we ought not to think of resting till our work is finished, which will not be till the 'security' of Pitt's famous answer is again achieved and the liberties of Europe are no longer in danger.

The second thing on which he insisted was hope:

> Hope, the paramount *duty* that Heaven lays,
> For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.

'I began with hope', he said in 1808, 'and hope has inwardly accompanied me to the end.' And so in the Tract on Cintra:

'There is a spiritual community binding together the living and the dead; the good, the brave and the wise of all ages. We would not be rejected from this community; and therefore do we hope. We look forward with erect mind, thinking and feeling; it is an obligation of duty; take away the sense of it, and the moral being would die within us'

His is no cheap or easy optimism:

> We know the arduous strife, the eternal laws
> To which the triumph of all good is given,
> High sacrifice and labour without pause,
> Even to the death.

So his Happy Warrior is

> doomed to go in company with Pain,
> And Fear, and Bloodshed.

And the people of England, as he sees them, are ready, without fear or flinching, to be

> left alone,
> The last that dare to struggle with the Foe.

And indeed he and his England had a harder task to face in that duty of hope than we have. Then, even so late as 1813, people like Lord Holland were wishing for French victories ; to-day not even our obscurest cranks wish success to the Germans. 'In Britain is one breath', said Wordsworth, seeing the ideal Britain and not the real. But what was not true then is true to-day. After a moment's hesitation the whole nation rallied to the great call ; and one of the most distinguished of the Liberals, who had hesitated during the critical days of decision and publicly expressed his hesitation, could write to a friend a fortnight later, after the Belgian crime, and find Wordsworth's ' In Britain is one breath ' the inevitable phrase in which to declare his recognition of the war as a war of justice, and the national cause as the cause of liberty and right. He and thousands of others would not have felt as they did and would not have thought of going to Wordsworth to utter what they felt, if they had not seen this war, as Wordsworth saw that of his day, as a struggle with the powers of darkness. Belgium opened their eyes. And the very blankness of her desolation, the utter and visible failure of all material means to avert her ruin, made them turn, like Wordsworth, to a deeper, a more inward consolation, at once a faith, a vision, and a call to arms ; made them say to Belgium, and to all who had died or were to die for her and for the cause which she sanctified by her martyrdom :

> Thou hast left behind
> Powers that will work for thee ; air, earth, and skies ;
> There 's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee ; thou hast great allies ;
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and Man's unconquerable mind.

APPENDIX A: WORDSWORTH AND ANNETTE

Since this was written the subject of Wordsworth and Annette has been further discussed by Mr. Harper in a little book called *Wordsworth's French Daughter*, and more recently by M. Legouis whose articles in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (April 1922) have now been reprinted and expanded into a volume entitled *William Wordsworth and Annette Vallon*. From the facts they set forth it is clear that Wordsworth throughout accepted his responsibilities as the father of Caroline. He had his name and place both at her baptism and at her marriage. At the first, one Dufour had a signed authority to represent him: at the second his consent appears on the certificate. In one interesting point M. Legouis corrects Mr. Harper. Annette Vallon and her family became extreme Royalists soon after Wordsworth knew her, she herself was afterwards known as an active Chouan conspirator, and her name, as M. Legouis has discovered, was on a police list of 'suspects' in the year 1800. Mr. Harper knew enough of this attitude to lead him, not unnaturally, to think that they already held these views, and in particular strong views against the constitutional clergy, at the time when Wordsworth and Annette were together: and that this might have been an obstacle to her marriage with a Protestant. But M. Legouis has discovered that there were two Vallons, Annette's uncles, who were Constitutional priests, and that her eldest brother had been baptized Jean Jacques; which does not suggest high Royalist or extreme Catholic opinions.

What then was the obstacle to the marriage? It is impossible now to say. Very likely the Vallon family were not very anxious that Annette should marry a foreign heretic of no profession and no fortune. And Wordsworth may have felt too poor to marry. After his return to England in December 1792 he certainly seriously considered marriage, and so, even more, did Annette who wrote pleading for it, for her child's sake, but generously adding 'only if there is not the slightest risk to be run'. But this was after the French declaration of war which took place on the 1st of February 1793, and made it very difficult, if not impossible, for Wordsworth to cross over to France. He related the whole story to Dorothy in his letters, and, at his wish, though Annette generously discouraged the plan, she confessed the secret to her uncle and aunt Cookson with whom she was then living, but naturally received no

encouragement of the idea of a marriage. A further discouragement of that idea may possibly be looked for in another direction suggested by M. Legouis. Wordsworth came at that time to be much influenced by the writings of Godwin who, as a pure rationalist, was anti-matrimonial, anti-sentimental, and even anti-emotional, and that influence may easily have disinclined Wordsworth to further attempts at carrying through a marriage against which reason had obviously a good deal to say. Difficulties and discouragements were increased as the war continued. There was some correspondence—much limited by the postal authorities and the police—but there could be no meeting. For that they had to wait till 1802 when the Peace of Amiens reopened France to Englishmen. In August of that year Wordsworth and Dorothy spent some weeks with Annette and Caroline at Calais, going to them straight from Mary Hutchinson to whom he was now engaged. No doubt the visit was, as Mr. Harper says, undertaken for the purpose of 'making a settlement with and bidding farewell to her and her child'. Probably by that time it was clear to all parties that a marriage between a man so intensely English, Protestant and still Liberal as Wordsworth, and a fanatical French Catholic and Royalist who could not even read English, was very unlikely to make for any one's happiness: especially as all must have felt that the Peace was only a doubtful and temporary truce. And in fact, of course, war soon began again and they were again separated for many years. When they next met, in 1820, the daughter through whom Wordsworth has a number of French descendants had been four years married. Annette and Caroline had wished Dorothy to be present at her wedding, and she was trying to arrange to go when the return from Elba took place and upset all plans. Ultimately the marriage was celebrated in Dorothy's absence in February 1816. But Wordsworth may be said to have been present at it in two ways. The marriage certificate names him as the bride's father, describing him as 'Williams [*sic*] Wordsworth, propriétaire' and giving his address. He was also connected with it in a more important way. Her husband was the brother of an officer who had been a prisoner in England and had become a friend of the poet and his family. So Wordsworth may indirectly have provided a husband for his daughter. She only saw him once after her marriage, when he and Mary and Dorothy and Crabb Robinson visited Paris and the two mothers

of Wordsworth's children met each other in the galleries of the Louvre! Have those galleries ever been the scene of a more interesting assignation?

So far the whole course of the difficult relation between the Wordsworths and the French mother and daughter had run with remarkable smoothness. But later on there was trouble. Professor Edith Morley, who is preparing the Crabb Robinson papers for publication, has recently discovered that Caroline's husband, whose name was Baudouin, made some claim upon the poet when he became Laureate and upon his family after his death. If he added any threat to publish inconvenient facts, as Professor Morley assumes, he mistook both the character of his father-in-law and the courage of Mrs. Wordsworth and the rest of the poet's friends after his death. Wordsworth refused Baudouin's application, on Crabb Robinson's advice, in 1843, and so, on the same advice, did his representatives in 1850. But hardly any of the letters dealing with these transactions have survived, and Robinson's diary contains few allusions to them. Those few, with some letters on the subject, are given by Professor Morley in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 15th February 1923. Other letters were destroyed, as is clear from a surviving letter of Quillinan, quoted by Professor Morley. So, after Wordsworth's death, were all the poet's papers concerning Annette and Caroline. The result of all this is that some parts of the story must always remain obscure. M. Legouis, writing to *The Literary Supplement*, on 8th March 1923, protests, not unnaturally, against Professor Morley's use of the word 'blackmail' in connexion with Baudouin's application for money. It is clear that that application was resented by the poet's friends: and it seems that they contemplated publishing the story in Christopher Wordsworth's biographical memoir as a means of forestalling, if necessary, any revelations that might be made by Baudouin. But none were made: and it is, at least, not clear that Baudouin ever went beyond a not unnatural request that some assistance should be given to Caroline and her children who were in difficult circumstances. But, however this may be, the new evidence proves, as M. Legouis points out, that Wordsworth had, at some time or other, done something for his daughter: for we find Crabb Robinson noting in his diary that, in his letter to Baudouin he had said that 'Wordsworth had not the means of doing anything further and that his means had been reduced'.

The story is not likely to be further elucidated. We shall

never know what Wordsworth did for Annette and Caroline at or after his marriage to Mary ; and we shall never be certain why he did not marry Annette in 1792. There may well have been reasons which we cannot now guess, besides the reasons which, as we have seen, are obvious enough. And possibly, as M. Legouis suggests, the temperamental caution and prudence of the poet may have been among them. Prudence is not now a popular virtue and never was among the prettiest. But it is a virtue still. If Shelley had had more of it how much misery he would have saved himself and Harriet ! Perhaps Wordsworth himself, even as it was, did not altogether escape remorse. There are several poems, *Vaudracour and Julia*, *Ruth*, *The Thorn* and others, which may possibly reflect something of the kind. The story of *Vaudracour and Julia* is indeed utterly unlike that of Wordsworth and Annette, and I see little reason for the view of M. Legouis that it is autobiographical. There is in fact nothing in it to be autobiographical except the central fact of the birth of a child without marriage of the parents. In all other details the story is plainly not that of Annette. But in this and those other poems of unhappy or deserted women he may well have had Annette in his mind. He must have been haunted sometimes, one would think, by the thought of her, as Shelley seems to have been, with so much more reason, by the memory of Harriet. Still, if we are to hear the conclusion of the whole matter, most people will agree that it must be that of M. Legouis whose minute investigation of the thirty years of the story leaves him with the conviction that the discovery only serves to make plainer than ever ' l'honnêteté profonde de l'homme '.

APPENDIX B

It does not appear that the revision of *The Prelude* in 1839 amounted to very much. Mr. Gordon Wordsworth writes to me that the early copies in his possession, two of which were made by Dorothy Wordsworth and Sara Hutchinson, do not, so far as he can see, ' support the theory of extensive modification in later years.' They do not appear to contain any allusions to Annette or any cancelled Godwinisms. All Mr. Wordsworth's transcripts exhibit alterations in the poet's hand, but they seem to be ' of style and technique rather than of substance '.

THACKERAY AND THE ENGLISH NOVEL[1]

The historical development of the story, whether it take the form of epic, drama, or novel, has been one from incident to character. In the matter of drama, Aristotle, as is well known, laid the main stress on plot, whereas it is the function of a modern critic, like Prof. C. E. Vaughan in his admirable work, *Types of Tragic Drama*, to point out that the balance has now shifted, and that in the drama of the modern world the main interest is not that of plot but that of character. And this is true whether we look at Shakespeare and the Romantics or at the classical tragedy of Racine or Alfieri. But the general law is really not so conspicuous in drama as it is in poetry and the novel. It is even obvious, for instance, that there is more study of character in Aeschylus and Sophocles, to say nothing of Euripides, than there is in the drama of Victor Hugo. The truth is that we do not possess any important drama—if any ever existed—of the period before character became an important interest. Directly Aeschylus, in the famous chorus, denied the accepted theory that prosperity causes the wrath of the gods and produces ruin, directly he proclaimed the new doctrine that it was never wealth or happiness, but always and only sin, that brought upon men the Divine anger, the really decisive step was taken. Man had become the architect of his own fate ; character had become destiny ; and incident, the fact or event in itself, the thing that just happens to a man irrespective of what he is, had been displaced by the greater interest

[1] This essay first appeared in the *Quarterly Review* for April 1912, as a review of the *Centenary Biographical Edition* of Thackeray.

of the deed which issues from a man's personality and results in his weal or woe, his life or death. No doubt the lesson was very insufficiently learned. The plays of the Middle Age, for instance, were, on the whole, childish things. But the very compactness of its form makes it more difficult for the drama than for the story in verse or prose to be satisfied with what one may call externality. It is on too small a scale to be able, like the mediaeval story, to give the loose helter-skelter of a world of disconnected events. And not only had it no room for multiplicity; it stood in visible need of unity; and real unity can only come into the picture through character. Consequently there is no great drama without it, the principal apparent exceptions to this rule, such as the earlier plays of Shakespeare, being great, so far as they are great at all, as poetry, history or story, rather than as drama. The only thing dramatically great in them is indeed just their partial introduction of internality, of the study of character, into what would otherwise represent life as a mere external pageant of strange, exciting, or amusing events. The essential condition of the drama is that it has to produce its effect within the space of two or three hours; and the insufficiency for that purpose of the loose method of the chronicle is obvious almost at once.

But it was not so obvious in other fields. Adventures as adventures, alike endless, meaningless and incredible, satisfied in the main the literary curiosity of the Middle Age. Chaucer came indeed for a moment to transform the mere picture of occurrences into an interpretation of human life, as Dante had read into it a still higher significance; but Chaucer's lesson, like Dante's, was on the whole lost with the teacher, and the story, whether in prose or verse, remained for centuries in an almost childish stage of externality. Boccaccio is not only the creator of Italian prose; he is a great artist. But in him, as in the authors of the

Fabliaux, the mere intrigue is the principal thing; the study of character is elementary or non-existent. And so it remains, broadly speaking, down to the eighteenth century, with the partial exception of Cervantes. The hour of the great novel was still not come. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the age of the drama, not of the novel; of life seen on a stage, not of life studied in a book; and those who asked of art an insight into the meaning of life went for their answer to the theatre of Shakespeare or Molière or Racine, not to any book which they could read at home. The genius of Cervantes could, in fact, only begin a work which could not be completed till more than a century after his death. The novel had no real chance till the age of the printed book and the general habit of reading had come, till poetry had begun to share its supremacy with prose, till the beginnings of the arrival of the social and intellectual middle class, that is to say, till the eighteenth century.

But then came a curious thing. The novel, which had hitherto paid almost no attention to character, took at once to paying too much. It is true that Defoe and Fielding still followed the old lines in the main. Robinson Crusoe is nothing but an individual placed in a singular situation, the consequences of which are set before us with amazing verisimilitude. The man himself is nothing. And though that cannot be said of Tom Jones and Parson Adams, it is still true of them that they are rather buried under their adventures. Fielding expects to interest us by what happens to them at least as much as by what they are. But the greatest English novelist of the eighteenth century was not Fielding, but Richardson. I am, of course, aware that this would not be universally admitted; but to me, at any rate, it seems plain that, though Fielding was the more attractive man of the two, the saner thinker, and even the better writer, he stands distinctly below Richardson as a master of the

novelist's art. *Clarissa* is a thing quite out of Fielding's reach. He never approached its noble unity of conception. Compared with Clarissa all his people seem superficial and external. He has never been inside the very soul of any of his creations, as Richardson has been inside the soul of Clarissa. It is a new world of imaginative power altogether that we come to when we pass from him to live, as Richardson can make us live, in the most secret chambers of Clarissa's being, identify ourselves with her, and hang breathless for whole volumes on the slow-moving crisis of her fate.

Now Richardson, whose work, it may be remarked, had immense popularity and influence abroad, lays his chief stress on character. Johnson, though a great admirer of Richardson, is well known to have said that, 'if you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so fretted that you would hang yourself'. No real Richardsonian would admit that. The story is, in fact, of absorbing interest; but the point is that it is interesting in the new way, not in the old. The stuff of the book is to be sought in the heart, mind, and soul of Clarissa; the things which happen are only its illustrations. It is the most individual book that was ever written, and in that sense the most modern. For the real difference between ancient literature and modern—one which, in spite of much loose talk to-day about the corporate spirit in Church and State, is continually growing wider—is the substitution of the individual for the State or the class or the family, as the centre of imaginative and dramatic interest. And Clarissa is the supreme instance of this. In her story we know nothing of State or Church, and in her family we have nothing but a collection of impertinent obstacles to the free development of an individual soul. This overpowering interest in character was safe enough in the case of a born story-teller like Richardson. With him the stress laid on the

inner life of an individual could not extinguish the plot altogether. Genius can in this way often manage to escape the dangers of its own age. But the fact that the novel had come to its own in a century given over as none before or since to the criticism of life and manners had its inevitable effect on others. And if we look at two famous stories by two very great men of letters, who, widely as they differed, were both very typical men of the eighteenth century and were the acknowledged chiefs of literature, each in his own country—if we look at *Rasselas* and *Candide*, we shall find that, where a man is not a born story-teller, he inevitably yields to the spirit of his age, and his story is buried in criticism of life and discussion of moral ideas. Plot, in fact, is nothing; the interest of character has destroyed it; and, as the life of the novel depends on the union of the two, the story, as a story, is dead. We read *Candide* to laugh with it, and *Rasselas* perhaps to learn from it, but no one will ever again read either for the story.

The problem of the novel was therefore left over for the nineteenth century to solve. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as in the Middle Age, it had tended to be a mere succession of disconnected adventures, superficial, external, accidental, neither influencing character nor influenced by it. In the eighteenth century it tends to become a moral essay. The interest now lies in character; but the plot, where there is one, is uninfluenced, and remains absurd and incredible, as in *Candide* and even in the beautiful masterpiece of Goldsmith. The thing the future had to try to do was to realize their union by interaction of the external and internal, circumstance making itself felt as the destiny which shapes character, and character asserting itself as the transforming architect of circumstance. But first of all the novel had to have its share in the general escape from the colourless abstraction of the eighteenth century. It had to recover the element of action, of poetry,

of visible life. All that was, of course, achieved by Scott with a splendour which carried him all over Europe. But Scott did not take his work seriously enough to grapple successfully with the artistic problem of the novelist. He can create the Antiquary, but he cannot create a rational or probable world of action for him to move in. Only, perhaps, in his most perfect story can he make the whole plot turn with complete dramatic probability round a central character ; and, when he has created Jeanie Deans and a world for her to dominate, he shows by the slipshod and vulgar fairy-tale of his last chapters how little he values or understands his achievement.

Scott's greatness lay not in any working of art but in the careless abundance of the world that came to life at his will, and in the genial sympathy with which he looked at every creature in it. ' Here is God's plenty,' we say as we read him ; a plenty still full of waste and disorder and apparent inconsequence, as it is in the greater world outside. But while he, out of this abundance of his, was pouring the riches of his genius into the treasury of the novel, there was a young woman who was putting into it two mites which, from the strict and narrow point of view of art, out-valued all his wealth. Jane Austen never ' gets out of the parlour ' ; nothing of importance happens in her novels ; nothing great is ever said in them ; but all that happens and all that is said belongs strictly to the persons who are the actors in the story. *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* may or may not be great novels, but perfect novels they unquestionably are. Here then, on a small scale, was the goal attained, plot and character interacting in unity. Henceforth there is no step to be taken in artistic method ; the development for the future is one not of method but of scale, not of art but of substance. The novel cannot be satisfied till it has tried to take all life, not Jane Austen's tiny fraction of life, for its province ; and for that it will have to gain a wider experience, a deeper emotion, a profounder philosophy,

a more scientific grasp of the forces which issue in the tragedy and comedy of human lives.

The effort to provide these is the history of the novel in the nineteenth century. That is, happily, not my present subject, for it would be a vast one. No previous century gave to the novel a twentieth or a fiftieth part of the literary energy given by the nineteenth. Everything in turn was poured into it : by Dickens an invincible belief in the value of life, an inexhaustible fountain of laughter and tears ; by the Brontë sisters an almost Shakespearean power of tragedy ; by George Eliot a seriousness both of mind and conscience, strange to what had previously been the least serious of literary forms ; by Victor Hugo an exuberance of power that could include, as in an epic, the whole life of his age ; by George Meredith a quality and quantity of brain which had never before been given to the novel ; by Flaubert that infinite patience both of art and science which is not genius, but the instrument by which genius may create perfection, if it retains the freedom to use the results with mastery and ease. All these and other things, which in earlier centuries would have taken other shapes, took in the nineteenth century the shape of the novel. By the end of the century, aided by the decay of the drama, the once despised novel could claim to be the principal interpreter of the mind of the age, second only in dignity to poetry and far superior to it in general popularity.

Among those who in England did most to give it that position was William Makepeace Thackeray, the centenary of whose birth was widely celebrated last year.[1] One of the best forms the celebration took was the issue by his old publishers of a Centenary Edition of his works, with Introductions by his daughter, Lady Ritchie. These Introductions are not, indeed, new. The bulk of them had already appeared in the Biographical Edition twelve years ago.

[1] i. e. in 1911.

But they have now been considerably enlarged and a few mistakes corrected. For instance, the present Introduction to *Vanity Fair* contains thirty-five pages, some half-dozen of which at least are absent from the old one, and they are not the least interesting, including, as they do, some extracts, which will be new to most people, from Whitwell Elwin's *Quarterly* essays on Thackeray, the statement that Dobbin was founded on Thackeray's (and FitzGerald's) great friend, Archdeacon Allen, and the curious conversation between Mr. J. E. Cooke and Thackeray as to whether Becky killed Jos Sedley. And there are a good many additional illustrations, both in the Introduction and in the book itself.

Thackeray did not wish his life to be written, and these charming pictures of him, as his daughter and his friends remember him, are likely to remain the nearest approach we shall ever get to an authoritative biography. Lady Ritchie's writing is, like her father's and even more so, of a very easy and desultory sort, rambling backwards and forwards over an uncertain country, very reluctant to be tied by any chronological or other order. As in the novels, so in these Introductions, we are often a little uncertain where we are, and what year or what people we are talking about. The daughter does not care any more than the father to make it quite clear who people are, and what relation they bear to each other ; and, like him, she frequently prefers to give us the marriage or the funeral first, and to say nothing about the courtship or illness till afterwards ; all of which is rather confusing. To give one instance only. *Vanity Fair* fills the first two volumes of the edition ; it may therefore be assumed that its Introduction will generally be the first read. Yet the reader, who may very possibly know nothing of Thackeray's life, is casually introduced to members of the Carmichael-Smyth family without a word of explanation of Thackeray's connexion with them. All we are told is that ' the schoolboy

often stayed with his stepfather and mother ' in Dr. James Carmichael-Smyth's house near the British Museum. Then follow other facts about that family, out of which you may extract the Thackeray relationship if you know it already, but not otherwise. It is a pity that people who write reminiscences will forget that we who read them need to be supplied with the groundwork of facts and dates which they themselves hold in their memories, and on which they safely make their pleasant embroideries. We cannot follow them comfortably unless we are plainly told who married whom, and when, if not where ; and how long each of them lived, and how many children they had.

But *nihil est ab omni Parte beatum.* We have to take things as they are. Perhaps Lady Ritchie could not have given us what she has given if she had undergone a training in the business methods of biography under Sir Leslie Stephen or Sir Sidney Lee. As it is, every one who reads these Introductions comes away with a sense of having, as it were, passed through a ' careless-ordered garden ' of pleasant and gracious memories, in which Thackeray appears and reappears as the principal figure. What is the ultimate impression left of him—of the man, not the writer—as we look at him here through his daughter's affectionate eyes, or divine him for ourselves behind the characters in his books ? Not that of a strong man certainly. A life of literature, journalism, and dining-out is not the sort of life that develops strength of will or character. He had a shrewd eye for his own defects as well as for those of others ; and he knew how to lay his finger on the root of them. ' Yes, it is very like—it is certainly very like,' he once said to an American lady as he looked at a volume of *Pendennis.* ' Like whom, Mr. Thackeray ? ' ' Oh ! like me, to be sure ; it is very like me.' ' Surely not,' objected the lady, ' for Pendennis was so weak ! ' ' Ah, well, Mrs. Baxter,' he replied, ' your humble servant is not very strong.' Thompson,

afterwards Master of Trinity, said of him that in his undergraduate days he led 'a somewhat lazy but pleasant and gentlemanlike life'; and though most of the laziness of it had perforce to go when he lost his fortune, some of its laziness as well as all of its gentlemanlike pleasantness lingered in the man of middle age; so that when, after praising Carlyle for living in a £40 house with only a 'snuffy Scotch maid to open the door', he fancies himself asked, 'And why don't you live with a maid yourself?' his reply is categorical enough: 'Well, I can't; I want a man to be going my own messages, which occupy him pretty well. There must be a cook, and a woman about the children, and that horse is the best doctor I get in London; in fine, there are a hundred good reasons for a lazy, liberal, not extravagant but costly way of life.' He was probably quite right. A prophet can denounce society without any other assistance than a Scotch maid-of-all-work; but Thackeray's business was to describe it, to extract its essence and convert it into art. That cannot be done without living in it, and then the man to go on messages and the rest of the machinery become valuable if not necessary at once.

It has been recorded that for a boy who did not play games he was 'wonderfully social, full of vivacity and enjoyment of life. His happy *insouciance* was constant. Never was any lad at once so jovial, so healthy and so sedentary.' There is the key of his life. A youth of these tastes was destined from the first to live the life of a man about town. And that life Thackeray did live always. But it is a complete mistake to think that he was subdued to it. He was above it, and in it, never merely and entirely of it. He caught from it its not unkindly tolerance of many sorts of men who would never have got past the snuffy Scotch maid of Cheyne Row; he learnt from it that truth on which saints and philosophers may sometimes reflect with wonder and humility, that this world is apparently

meant to be a place of multiplicity and variety ; and would not be so interesting, nor even, he is bold enough to tell his mother, ' so good a world as it is, were all men like ' his saintly friend John Allen. But he knew the worth of such a man, ' yearning day and night in the most intense efforts to gain Christian perfection,' and wrote to him, ' I love you with all my heart and soul. I owe more to you than to all others put together.' But, for good or for evil, he and Allen were different men and perforce lived different lives. And it may be that, though Allen was the better man, Thackeray was the better preacher, and was enabled to make the more breaches in the fortifications of the world precisely by knowing its strong and weak places from inside.

If that was so, it was, of course, because he kept his heart sound. He had been near enough to Major Pendennis to understand his point of view as no one else before or since has ever understood it, but he never himself became Major Pendennis. If he had, he could not have painted that wonderful portrait. Arthur Pendennis could paint himself, more or less, because he saw a good many points of view beside his own, and was never quite sure what his own was. But pure worldlings and pure saints, like the Major and Archdeacon Allen, could never depict themselves because they never for a moment get outside their own point of view. Thackeray, of course, was inside and also outside them all ; and so could understand, love, and judge Allen, and could create the immortal Major. Perhaps there are too many worldlings in his books ; and perhaps he knew too many in his life. Even of himself, perhaps, one side was the Sadducee whom he denounces in Arthur Pendennis.

' Friend Arthur was a Sadducee, and the Baptist might be in the Wilderness shouting to the poor, who were listening with all their might and faith to the preacher's awful accents and denunciations of wrath or woe or salvation ; and our friend the Sadducee would turn his sleek mule with a shrug and a smile from the crowd, and go home to the shade of his

terrace, and muse over preacher and audience, and turn to his roll of Plato, or his pleasant Greek song-book babbling of honey and Hybla and nymphs and fountains and love.'

But it was the side which was kept under, which was judged and condemned and defeated.

'If, seeing and acknowledging the lies of the world, Arthur, as see them you can with only too fatal a clearness, you submit to them without any protest further than a laugh; if, plunged yourself in easy sensuality, you allow the whole wretched world to pass groaning by you unmoved; if the fight for the truth is taking place, and all men of honour are on the ground armed on the one side or the other, and you alone are to lie on your balcony and smoke your pipe out of the noise and the danger, you had better have died, or never have been at all, than such a sensual coward.'

That is not the language of the worldling. It is a different thing—the language of a man who knew inside as well as outside himself what worldlings are. 'Charges of cynicism,' as Meredith said, 'are common against all satirists. Thackeray had to bear with them.' But, as Meredith adds, the man himself was 'one of the manliest, the kindliest of human creatures. It was the love of his art that exposed him to misinterpretation. . . . He described his world as an accurate observer saw it; he could not be dishonest.' Those who knew him knew well how much the opposite of a cynic he was; and Shirley Brooks expressed their feelings in *Punch* when he wrote the memorial verses which begin:

> He was a cynic! By his life all wrought
> Of generous acts, mild words, and gentle ways;
> His heart wide open to all kindly thought,
> His hand so quick to give, his tongue to praise!

And did any real cynic ever love his children? These Introductions show how Thackeray loved his, and how he was loved in return. No claims or pleasures of the world were ever allowed to keep him apart from his two girls. When he and they were unavoidably separated, he was a constant and affectionate correspondent; when all were

at home together, they were his chosen companions ; and his engagement to dine with them so many nights a week took precedence of all others, however distinguished.

It is inevitable that the Introductions should deal rather with the man than with the writer. They are avowedly biographical, and Lady Ritchie would naturally decline the part of her father's critic. But, after all, the man is remembered for the writer's sake. And besides, *caret vate sacro.* He desired not to have and has not had a biographer. We shall never know him as we know Johnson or Scott. He will therefore stand or fall by his own writings. What place is he likely permanently to occupy in the roll of English writers ? What part did he play in that brilliant development of the novel which, as we were saying just now, was such a striking feature of the century in which he lived ?

Flaubert, in one of his letters to George Sand, makes a very interesting remark about English novelists. He has been reading *Pickwick*, and he says of it, 'il y a des parties superbes, mais quelle composition défectueuse ! Tous les écrivains anglais en sont là ; Walter Scott excepté, ils manquent de plan.' He probably had never heard of Jane Austen ; and, of course, his remark does not apply to the work of the last forty or fifty years. But even to-day, looking broadly at the English novel, it is still true, in spite of Scott and Jane Austen and George Eliot and Hardy, that it is singularly loose in construction. Of that weakness Thackeray is almost the worst example. No doubt the detestable method of writing novels for magazines in parts, so that the whole story is never before the author for revision, is largely responsible for the incoherence of the plots of Dickens and Thackeray. The first parts are printed, and then the novelist begins to see the story moving in a new direction, or, as Thackeray so often says, the characters insist on going their own way, and it turns out to be not at all the way mapped out for them by the author in the

first chapters, before they themselves got warm with life and knew what they wanted; and the result is that mist of confusion and inconsistency which hangs over nearly all the stories both of Dickens and Thackeray. No one could write out a skeleton of the plot of *Pickwick* or *Pendennis*; they are all flesh and no bones, and their progress is as elastic and uncertain of direction as those of a boneless body would be. Dickens's good things, in particular, are always isolated and unrelated atoms, not parts of an organized body. Weller and Winkle and Micawber and Mrs. Gamp are perfect in themselves; they come full-armed from their creator's brain and owe nothing to those about them, who equally owe nothing to them. What a contrast to Jeanie Deans, or Maggie Tulliver, or Madame Bovary, or Bathsheba Everdene! Thackeray's people belong far more to his stories than those of Dickens; but still he is open in his degree to the same criticism. When we think of *Vanity Fair* we remember Becky and Miss Crawley and certain scenes and places—Sir Pitt on his knees, Rawdon Crawley's discovery of Steyne and Becky, and so forth; we don't think of the story as a whole, and the other persons in it. Where there is a real plot it is impossible to think of one character alone; to recall Bathsheba is at once to recall Oak, and Boldwood, and Troy.

Part of the explanation of this is that both Dickens and Thackeray reverted to the old epic tendencies of the novel as against the stricter influence of the drama that had been lately brought to bear on its development. *Pickwick* and *Barry Lyndon* and that 'novel without a hero', *Vanity Fair*, are all, like the *Odyssey* and *Orlando Furioso* and *Don Quixote* and *Gil Blas* and *Tom Jones*, the loosely-connected adventures of a wandering 'hero', who, in the course of his goings about the world, shows us a great deal of the life and manners of his day. So large and discursive an 'action' does not generally admit the intensity

of the drama. It is almost inevitably too external to do so. And so Dickens never, except in *A Tale of Two Cities*, got near the drama; everywhere else—perhaps even there—what he approaches is not drama but only melodrama, which, it is to be remembered, is what results when, in the words of a living critic, 'a dramatist attempts tragedy with characters over whom he has no philosophic superiority, or with a situation which is to him nothing but a series of startling events.' Both of these unfavourable conditions are always present in Dickens, but not, it is true, in Thackeray, who maintained more than enough superiority over his characters, and was always too intellectually middle-aged to be anything but bored by mere startling events. What then, in his case, is the explanation of the fact, which I think will hardly be denied, that he seldom or never leaves on us the intensity of impression which belongs to the experience of having been through a great action where a great issue was at stake? We do get that impression from *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *The Heart of Midlothian*, and *Villette* and *Adam Bede*, and *The Return of the Native*; why do we not get it from *The Newcomes* or *Vanity Fair*?

On the whole I am afraid it is because Thackeray's books are too much written from the point of view of the man of the world. No one knows quite so little of the real meaning of life as the man who habitually watches it from club windows; no one's view of it so entirely stops short at the things on the surface. And though Thackeray was much more than a club man, it is that part of himself which chiefly devised his stories. The people who crowd his stage could not possibly have anything to do with great actions or great issues. Nobody can imagine Major Pendennis or Barnes Newcome loving or dying; the most either could attain to would not go farther than having his marriage arranged, or his decease announced in *The Times*. The fountains of great life, which spring from the heart, are dried

up in them. Whatever soul they may have once had has as entirely disappeared under a continual overlaying of worldliness as the souls of Mr. Bernard Shaw's people have disappeared under a continuous course of dialectics in which nobody is himself moved or expects to move anybody else. Emotion, in fact, is out of the range of those whose occupation is to play with the intellectual or sensual counters of life, not with life itself. And great emotion is the necessary atmosphere of great action. The fact, then, that Thackeray's characters consist so very largely of people of the 'Hon. Mr. Deuceace' type is fatal to the claim of his novels to convey to us the greater emotions. There is a certain monotony of littleness in his work. One grows weary of the perpetual repetition of the intrigues and meanness and emptiness of the world in which nearly all his characters live. He seems to take pleasure in introducing irrelevant personages who play no real part in his story, but apparently come in merely to be shown at their business of dining and gambling and match-hunting, which the necessary one-sidedness of the satirist supposes to be the business of all persons who are well-to-do in this world.

The fact is that the determination to have done with shams, which was as strong in Thackeray as in Carlyle, really led him to a new sort of sham. Because many persons made a pretence of being actuated by fine motives when they were in fact looking out for themselves, Thackeray chose sometimes to assume that men of the world never in any case thought of anything but themselves; which is a sham or delusion as much as the other, the truth, of course, being that very few people, whether in the world of fashion or any other world, act either on entirely selfish or entirely unselfish grounds. I expect Miss Crawley and Becky had at least a grain or two of real kindliness mixed into their desire to get the most out of each other; and there was probably some motherly love mixed with the astute generalship of

Mrs. Bute. But it was neither Thackeray's business nor his temperament to see that. When he saw goodness he saw it very good indeed, and not very strong, very wise, or very interesting. His intelligence always inclined to paint the world black; and any white patches that were forced into the picture came not from his imagination but from his heart. The remorseless realism of the satirist found nothing on the aesthetic side of him to check it. His heart overflowed very easily into genuine tears that for the moment washed the analysing sceptic and cynic away; but nothing else did, certainly not his imagination. It is curious to see how entirely unmoved, to speak frankly how stupid, he showed himself both at Athens and at Rome. And so he always treats history from the point of view of the prose realist who means at all costs to get rid of the heroic and bring forward the mean or ridiculous side that may generally be found by him who looks for it in the greatest events.

His method is seen in its most brilliant shape in *The Second Funeral of Napoleon*; it is that of a man who, as its opening paragraphs show, quite deliberately chose the part of the Argus-eyed valet who has seen all heroes naked; and one may be the exact reverse of a Napoleon-worshipper without liking it, indeed without being able to avoid feeling strongly that, even in that case, it is the Devil's method of writing history. I am not speaking of morals. The spirit that denied in Thackeray never denied goodness; what it denied was greatness in history, greatness in art, greatness in life. There are plenty of good figures in the novels, and for my part, I do not at all find them so insipid as they often have been called; but no one will pretend that either Dobbin, or Colonel Newcome, or Warrington can have greatness thrust upon him even by the blindest affection. Thackeray is the first instance in English of the everlasting nemesis of realism; it gets so close to its object that the only things it can see are small things. We laugh at his

people or weep with them; we love them or hate them; but we never, or almost never, admire them.

Yet he wrote the most brilliant English novel, in some ways the greatest, of the nineteenth century! And, though it is a real defect in a novelist to leave out, as he did, so many of the biggest things in human life, he might yet fairly reply that those who can give the whole of life are very few, so that art is forced to these narrowing choices and partial views. At any rate, if he did not make his people admirable, he made them astonishingly alive. He had the merits of his defects. If realism like his, in its eagerness to strip off trappings, is apt to strip off a great deal else as well, it does at least strip off the trappings. Becky stands eternally before us, naked and unashamed, the first instance, perhaps, in literature of cleverness standing absolutely alone. Iago, after all, appears to have had a devil of hatred in him; but Becky has no emotions good or bad. She just has her brains to fight the world with, and she does her sword-play so brilliantly that every one likes her and wishes her success. We are all greedy of pleasure, and she gives us so much that it is with her almost as it is with Falstaff and Mrs. Gamp; she has extended the bounds of life for us, and we resent her misfortunes, however justly deserved. But *Vanity Fair* is much more than Becky. It is a prose epic of a siege of Mayfair which lasted more than ten years and in which, though Becky alone is the Achilles, who certainly never sulks in her tent, there are still, as of old, plenty of other warriors engaged who all distinguish themselves in ways proper to this kind of warfare. The greatest achievement of the epic is to get a whole age into itself. That grows increasingly difficult as the world gets larger and more complicated, and better informed about its own life. Thackeray at any rate could not do it even superficially, as Victor Hugo did in *Les Misérables*. He only knew one world—that of the well-to-do—and seldom adventured

outside it and its satellites. But what a master he is there, always, of course, under those inevitable limitations of the satirist. There are, no doubt, such things as good Marquises and Mayfair people who are indifferent to rank or money. But they were not Thackeray's affair. His business was with the others, who do indeed usually secure the places nearest the footlights on that bustling and crowded stage where the play of Vanity Fair is continuously performed by day and by night. Of that play he is the greatest of all showmen. Balzac covers wider ground and is a finer artist in construction, but on this particular field he strikes one after Thackeray as heavy, prosaic, and *bourgeois*. Vanity Fair at play, which Thackeray so often gives us, is certainly not an inspiring or beautiful spectacle ; but it is a delightful and amusing entertainment compared with Vanity Fair at business, which is Balzac's commoner theme. The sustained unity of impression of *Eugénie Grandet* or *La Vieille Fille* is quite out of Thackeray's reach ; but so, I think, is the vivacity of the scene between Morgan and Major Pendennis out of Balzac's.

No doubt the showman obtrudes himself too freely. The manager in modern evening dress coming on to direct his actors before our eyes cannot fail to destroy the illusion. Thackeray's frequent personal interventions prevent our giving his stories enough of that temporary suspension of our knowledge of their unreality which in one shape or other is necessary to all art. Many people complain of his sermons. But though they are certainly too frequent and repeat themselves too much, they do grow immediately out of the story, and justify themselves, besides, by being among the most effective sermons to be found anywhere in the English language. Ruskin would not have one line of Thackeray, if I remember right, in his list of A Hundred Best Books, because he thought Thackeray made people worldly and cynical. This seems to me as hasty and wilful as any judgement,

even any of Ruskin's, could well be. The truth is the exact opposite. No one has ever painted the two pictures of selfish worldliness, on the one hand, and love, genuineness and simplicity, on the other, with such convincing power of appeal in favour of the latter as Thackeray. He lets the worldling design his story and occupy nearly the whole of his stage; but what the worldling does on it is to exhibit his own emptiness and ugliness, and assuredly none of the spectators are tempted to envy or adopt his way of life. On the contrary, the balance is all in the other scale; and many a half-worldling man or woman must have felt, as he read the story of Ethel Newcome or Beatrix Esmond or even Arthur Pendennis, that no pulpit has ever put to him the greatest of all choices as it is put there, and must have wondered to find himself still so capable of being moved, to find his heart-strings loosened and his tears flowing, not for Ethel or Beatrix only, but for himself and many other weak and struggling men and women.

These three books are, no doubt, Thackeray's best, after the supreme and unapproachable *Vanity Fair*. That stands alone in all sorts of merits; chiefly, perhaps, in the fact that it is the only one of his books which is never tedious. Thackeray is there for once caught out of himself and swept along in an irresistible torrent of energy which makes a world, though it scarcely makes a story. No one who can take up *Vanity Fair* without being obliged to read it to the end, even if it be for the fiftieth time, has ever really felt the genius of Thackeray. After it many people would place *Esmond*, certainly his most beautiful book. But, beautiful as it is, it seems to me not altogether to escape the inevitable fate of the *tour de force*; 'c'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas'—the real thing, as we know it in *Vanity Fair* and *The Newcomes*. It is an exquisite piece of artistry rather than a great work of imagination believing in itself. Would Thackeray in any of his contemporary novels have

failed to be sensitive to the false note involved in Esmond marrying his mistress's mother? It seems profanation to criticize a thing of such beauty; still there can be little doubt that Thackeray was primarily a satirist, and that his true business was therefore with his own day; in which case, though he himself said he would 'like to stand or fall by Esmond', his genius must ultimately be judged by the three great pictures of the world which he himself knew, not from books, but from personal experience. And of the two minor performances I confess to greatly preferring *The Newcomes*. It seems to me so much more alive. How much more one really cares about what is going to happen to Clive and Ethel and old Colonel Newcome than one does about Pendennis and Laura and Warrington! And old Lady Kew and Barnes and the Newcome world generally are fifty times as vivid as the Claverings and Fokers. Major Pendennis is indeed a creation of genius; but his is a rather solitary splendour.

A word should perhaps be said of the only other work of Thackeray for which a claim to pre-eminence is ever raised. Trollope thought that 'in mental force' Thackeray never rose above *Barry Lyndon*. What exactly he means by mental force may be doubtful; but the judgement seems to me simply amazing, if meant to place *Barry Lyndon* in the same rank as the great three or *Esmond*. What is a novel? It is a story and a picture of life. And the measure of its greatness lies in the depth, truth, and abundance of its life, and in the power of art under which it is compelled into shape, made to take the mould of a controlling human mind. What has *Barry Lyndon* of all this? It is the loosely-constructed adventures of a clever scoundrel who runs all over Europe and yet scarcely meets a single person who is not as great a blackguard as himself. No doubt Thackeray displays immense *verve* in being able to carry through such a history at all; and certainly he shows considerable powers

of invention in the matter of the accidents of the hero's career. But how superficial it all is! Barry is the conventional external profligate and adventurer of the old satirists and dramatists: what a contrast to Thackeray's manner when he has really formed himself! One chapter tells us more of the heart, or no heart, of the great adventuress of *Vanity Fair* than the whole book tells us of Barry. We look through a window and see him, some way off, a stagy figure, swaggering about the picturesque Ireland and Germany of the eighteenth century; but we never really know him at all. And if we put aside the contemporary novels, and try Barry by the side of the other eighteenth-century creation, what chance can its monotonous externality have against the humanity, variety, intimacy, and beauty of *The History of Henry Esmond*?

No; what Lady Kew said to Ethel in one of the best conversations in *The Newcomes* is true of all of us, and certainly not least of Thackeray. 'You belong to your belongings, my dear,' said that very shrewd old lady; and the belongings of Thackeray were the Pall Mall and Mayfair of the first half of the nineteenth century. He stands alone, has no very obvious ancestors, and no descendants at all. Fielding is certainly the man he owed most to; the same method, that of a series of rambling adventures, the same habit of talking to his reader direct, the same admirable and beautiful English, refined, of course, perhaps weakened, to the taste of a generation that came after instead of before Wesley and Whitefield, but still essentially the same; a language of unapproachable ease, seeming, especially in the later master's hands, to be the very language of every day and of all the world, and yet never stupid, never inharmonious, never obscure, never unconscious of the great tradition, full everywhere of music and meaning and truth. No one else gives quite the same impression as Thackeray of complete mastery over his instrument; one feels he could run up and down the keyboard for ever and never strike

a false note. Certainly no other writer of novels approaches him in this quality of liquid ease. His style may sometimes be too garrulous and conversational; and, of course, it was never meant to handle and never tries to handle the great things of nature and art. It could not have done the work of Scott or Hardy or Meredith. But when one comes fresh from a long summer bathe in its cool smooth waters, how much other people suffer by the comparison; how stilted and conventional much of Scott seems, how crude much of Dickens, how tainted with virtuosity most of Meredith!

Thackeray found the novel divided between the historical romance of Scott and the exquisite parlour miniatures of Miss Austen. What he did with it was to give it the modernism that was not in Scott and the scale and range that was not in Jane Austen. Both he and Dickens deserted the strict construction of Miss Austen, and to some extent of Scott, in favour of the old loose epic model. And both turned to their own day for their material. But Thackeray was far more interested in character than Dickens, and knew immeasurably more about it. Dickens lives by his exuberant vitality, his inexhaustible humour, and the immense pleasure he takes in the spectacle of life, not by his characters, which whether they belong to melodrama or farce, are seldom of the sort that convince. Thackeray lives, on the other hand, by his subtle insight into character, by the charm of his style, by the essential permanence of the world he described. The world does not grow poorer;[1] and wherever there is a rich society there will Lady Kew and Major Pendennis be gathered together. Dickens, on the contrary, suffers by the fact that the lives of the poor and the lower middle class which he described so vividly have changed so much in half a century that the manners and customs we find in his books are almost as remote from us as those of Scott's Crusaders. And one other thing. Dickens devoted himself in his novels to the assault upon

[1] Written, of course, in 1912.

special evils—bad schools, bad law courts, bad workhouses and so forth. These are all now reformed or extinct and his novels suffer in consequence from a certain air of tilting at windmills. Thackeray's subject, on the other hand, was the struggle between the spirit of the world and the best instincts of the human heart, a struggle which is not likely to be concluded this year or next.

So these two very different men go down the generations bearing their very different sheaves with them ; and no one can confidently say as yet which sheaf will prove more valuable in the ultimate market of posterity. Thackeray, at any rate, must fight his own battle ; for he left no successors. And since his day the novel has followed other paths. The chief, perhaps, is one that his path led us into. The worst of the good sort of realism is that it will lead to naturalism. When people have been given real life under the conditions of art, as in *Vanity Fair*, they soon want it without those conditions, as in Zola. In an age of science there is inevitably a confusion between the province of science and that of art. People very easily forget that art is the child of the imagination, and that, as Mr. Hardy has told us, a good work of imagination is truer than any literally exact history. But to forget that is to accept the substitution of facts for truth. The conversations in many recent novels are as stupidly true as if they had been taken down by a reporter in a boarding house. The sayings and doings in such a book as *The Card* are as uninteresting as the photographs in the shop-windows, as like life as they are and as empty and superficial. But naturalism, however fatal for the moment to such artistic realism as Thackeray's, can have no permanent life, because it is not art at all but a bastard kind of science intruding into the world of art.

Thackeray has, however, suffered from the arising of other needs which neither he nor Dickens could satisfy. As the novel increased in importance and became the

principal vehicle of literary expression, people naturally demanded that it should express their attitude towards the great problems of life and destiny. In a word, they demanded from it something like a philosophy of the meaning of things. And so, many people turned from Thackeray to such writers as George Eliot and George Meredith, who were felt to make an attempt to explain, if no longer perhaps to justify, the ways of God to man. And finally those who thought as well as read were certain not to rest content for ever with the ruthlessly prosaic note of Thackeray or the sentimentalism which was almost his solitary escape from it. If the novel was to absorb the work of all other forms of literature, it must needs satisfy the eternal demand for poetry. And so those to whom Thackeray seemed to be immeshed in this visible world as we know it drew away from him to one who appeared to give so much more—the invisible, intangible essence of life, its spirit, in a word its poetry—and transferred their allegiance to Mr. Hardy. The love of nature too, the sense of a Presence about us which the forms of nature somehow reveal, has been growing ever since Wordsworth's day ; and the novel could not do without it for ever, as Thackeray did ; so that for this reason again people turned from him to the Brontës, to George Eliot, to George Meredith, and above all again to Mr. Hardy.

All these things are against Thackeray, yet so much is for him that he triumphantly survives them. *Non omnes omnia.* He cannot give us what others give, but he gives us of his own no mean or ordinary gift. After all the great fact remains. *Vanity Fair* was written in 1847 ; and it is still doubtful whether, in spite of all its limitations, it is not on the whole the greatest novel in the language. A writer who is still talked of for the first prize in the race which he began to run longer ago than the historic Sixty Years Since can have no complaint to make of his treatment at the hands of Fame.

NAPOLEON IN POETRY

It is curious how little the poets have been inspired by the great men of action. It is history, not poetry, which has sung the praises of Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar. Our own heroes have fared rather better. Cromwell's name has received poetic preservation at the hands of Milton, Dryden and Marvell, and is enshrined in that witty apology for a poem, worth many poems such as most of his, which Waller made to Charles II. Wellington's fame is consecrated by the organ music of the great ode in which Tennyson gave a more sustained exhibition of his power of making rhythm reflect and re-create emotion than he was ever to give again, except perhaps in another poem to the glory of a famous man of action, *The Revenge*. But is Marlborough remembered by anything but Pope's account of how in him

> guilt and greatness equal ran,
> And all that raised the hero sunk the man,

or Johnson's finer lines—

> In life's last scene what prodigies surprise,
> Fears of the brave, and follies of the wise!
> From Marlborough's eyes the streams of dotage flow,
> And Swift expires a driveller and a show?

What has Chatham besides Cowper's two panegyrics, the finer of which links his name with that of the hero whom he discovered?—

> praise enough
> To fill the ambition of a private man,
> That Chatham's language was his mother tongue,
> And Wolfe's great name compatriot with his own.

Has Pitt anything worth having except Scott's splendid tribute—

Now is the stately column broke,
The beacon-light is quenched in smoke,
The trumpet's silver sound is still,
The warder silent on the hill !—

in the introduction to the first canto of *Marmion* ? Fox, who was scarcely a man of action, shares that, and has, besides, Wordsworth's beautiful lines written in expectation of his death. The hero of heroes, Nelson, besides being the third figure in Scott's Introduction, has the greater tributes of Wordsworth in *The Happy Warrior*, of Campbell in *The Battle of the Baltic*, and of Tennyson in the Wellington ode. But how little all these amount to when compared with the innumerable acts of homage which the poets have done to each other, of which *Astrophel*, *Lycidas*, *Adonais*, Arnold's *Thyrsis* and *Memorial Verses*, and Tennyson's tributes to Milton, Virgil and Catullus, are only the brightest stars in a vast constellation ?

Napoleon is, in some respects, the greatest of all men of action. Alexander made more splendid conquests and conquests that had much more durable results. Both he and Caesar held for a time undisputed sway over nearly the whole of the civilized world. Both rendered immense services to the world : and Caesar at any rate, if not Alexander, had gifts both of heart and head of which Napoleon had nothing. And Alexander and Caesar died in the plenitude of their power ; while Napoleon's reign was brought to its end, not by death but by his own obstinate, one may almost say stupid, incapacity to perceive the difference between the attainable and the unattainable. Yet, though his career ended in failure, some good judges have held him a greater man than either. He had far greater difficulties to encounter than they. Each of them found ready made to his hand a powerful machine of State, the only one of real power in the world of his day. Napoleon, on the other hand, inherited a France which had only just begun to recover from the corruption of the old régime and the subsequent incapacity

of Lord Morley's 'pitiably incompetent spinster', Robespierre. That France he quickly made the first nation in the world, first in all the efficiencies both of war and of peace; with only two exceptions, that he left the sea out of his conception of war and liberty out of his conception of peace. In energy of mind and of body he has probably never had a superior. And if, as Meredith said, this 'hugest of engines' was 'a much limited man', yet the thunder of the engine shook Europe out of her slumbers as she had not been shaken since she heard the disturbing voice of Luther. Still the strange fact remains that this wonderful story does not appear to have much attracted the poets. Here is the most dazzling career recorded in history. No man, certainly no man of anything like Napoleon's genius, ever had so strange a rise followed by so strange a fall. Few men have ever been more admired, adored, or loathed. And yet this daemonic being has inspired little poetry, and of that little not much is of the finer sort. Neither the angel which some saw in him, nor the devil which others saw, has won for himself that resurrection into the eternal life of art which has been achieved by so many less interesting historical figures. If Napoleon had lived a hundred years earlier, Scott might have done for him what he has done for Louis XI and Elizabeth and Richard of the Lion Heart. But contemporaries seldom succeed in fiction, and the nearest Scott could come to his own day was the Charles Edward of *Waverley* and *Redgauntlet*. So, on the whole, Napoleon must look to the historians, not to the poets, for his fame.

The most celebrated poem ever written about him is probably Manzoni's *Il Cinque Maggio*. That had once an immense vogue, and not only in Italy. A hundred years ago Italian was far more commonly known in England than it is now. So when Manzoni's ode appeared it had more English readers than any Italian poem, on whatever subject, could possibly have to-day. And it was read with that passionate

enthusiasm for poetry (not always, no doubt, the best poetry as we count the best to-day) with which Scott and Byron and some lesser luminaries had fired the generation which lived after Waterloo. It is said to be the most popular lyric in Italian : and one occasionally comes across curious proofs of its former English popularity. I was once sitting with a very old lady who had partly lost her mind. I happened, without any thought of her, to read aloud the first few words of Manzoni's poem. They at once struck some hidden spark in her memory and in a moment she was, as it were, on fire with excitement, and recited the whole poem with the kind of sonorous enthusiasm which one supposes to have been the fashion set by Mrs. Siddons. And not at all a bad fashion either ! It suited well with that old poetic eloquence, the eloquence of an age of oratory, an age which delighted in Cicero and knew Virgil by heart, which had heard Fox and Pitt challenge the glories of the ancient orators, and Burke, perhaps, surpass them. How magnificently the ode begins !

Ei fu ! Siccome immobile,
Dato il mortal sospiro
Stette la spoglia immemore,
Orba di tanto spiro,
Così percossa, attonita
La terra al nunzio sta,
Muta pensando all' ultima
Ora dell'uom fatale ;
Nè sa quando una simile
Orma di piè mortale
La sua cruenta polvere
A calpestar verrà.

The thought is obvious enough, of course, as that of so much great poetry seems to be. It is one which could hardly fail to occur to every man of imagination. It recurs in Shelley's poem on the occasion :

What ! alive and so bold, O Earth ?
. . . . . .
Are not the limbs still when the ghost is fled,
And canst thou move, Napoleon being dead ?

Part of it, the greatest and most universal part, earth's amazement at the fall of what looked like omnipotence, was uttered in ancient days, by a greater poet than Manzoni or even Shelley, at the death of one whose subjects were wont to hail him with the salutation ' O King live for ever ! '

' How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning ! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations ! Art thou also become weak as we ? art thou become like unto us ? . . . They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms ? '

Isaiah's wonder has no admiration in it : it is a wonder of hatred and scorn. Manzoni's is very far from that. It has more of love than of hate in it, and notes that the exile of St. Helena was the mark of suspicion and of pity, of inexhaustible hatred and unquenchable love. The day of final judgment is not yet, says Manzoni : that must be left to future generations : we who saw and felt him cannot judge him : we only know that he was the mightiest of the sons of men.

Fu vera gloria ? Ai posteri
L'ardua sentenza : noi
Chiniam la fronte al Massimo
Fattor, che volle in lui
Del creator suo spirito
Più vasta orma stampar.

Something of the same note is struck in the *Lui* of Victor Hugo which is, as might be expected, cleverer and far more brilliant than Manzoni's poem. Hugo, as usual, calls in all history and all geography to furnish him with the gorgeous colours which he seldom denies himself. And certainly Napoleon provides him with a better justification than he often has for his far-fetched and exotic splendours. The poet who celebrates the spoiler of the world is entitled to some fine things to do it with. And if *Lui* lacks that sense

of the seriousness of things which makes a large part of the greatness of Manzoni's poem, if its postures and flourishes occasionally cross the line which separates the sublime from the ridiculous, as in the line :

Napoléon ! soleil dont je suis le Memnon !

that is no more than every reader of Hugo will expect. The poem has many resemblances to *Il Cinque Maggio*—especially, of course, the idea of the all-pervading greatness, almost immensity, of the man. So it begins :

Toujours lui ! Lui partout !—Ou brûlante ou glacée,
Son image sans cesse ébranle ma pensée.
Il verse à mon esprit le souffle créateur.
Je tremble, et dans ma bouche abondent les paroles
Quand son nom gigantesque, entouré d'auréoles,
Se dresse dans mon vers de toute sa hauteur.

But apart from the effective opening there is nothing very wonderful in this. It is the poorest of tributes to Napoleon to say that his image set a flood of words flowing from Hugo's mouth. There were very few things which could not do that. But the flow certainly runs on through some twenty brilliant stanzas which are so many lantern flashes of the various scenes of Napoleon's career. And then, at last, comes the really fine thing in the poem, which, characteristically enough, is a simile. No modern poet, I suppose, approaches Hugo in the prodigious abundance, variety and beauty of his similes, and he has seldom excelled this one in all the things which mind and eye and tongue could bring to the making of a simile. When he did excel it, as he sometimes did, it was because he was able to call in the help of something which is not here—his heart. He has just said, in a line which could only come from him or from Byron to whom he owed so much :

Tu domines notre âge : ange ou démon, qu'importe ?

and then the great picture, with its lovely lines and its entire

fitness for the work it has to do, begins, in the stately way of the old epics :

Ainsi, quand, du Vésuve explorant le domaine,
De Naple à Portici l'étranger se promène,
Lorsqu'il trouble, rêveur, de ses pas importuns
Ischia, de ses fleurs embaumant l'onde heureuse
Dont le bruit, comme un chant de sultane amoureuse,
Semble une voix qui vole au milieu des parfums ;

Qu'il hante de Pæstum l'auguste colonnade,
Qu'il écoute à Pouzzol la vive sérénade
Chantant la tarentelle au pied d'un mur toscan ;
Qu'il éveille en passant cette cité momie,
Pompéi, corps gisant d'une ville endormie,
Saisie un jour par le volcan ;

Qu'il erre au Pausilippe avec la barque agile
D'où le brun marinier chante Tasse à Virgile ;
Toujours, sous l'arbre vert, sur les lits de gazon,
Toujours il voit, du sein des mers et des prairies,
Du haut des caps, du bord des presqu'îles fleuries,
Toujours le noir géant qui fume à l'horizon !

A graver note is struck in the *Napoléon II* of *Les Chants du Crépuscule*. The poem begins with the happiest moment in the Emperor's life when the guns announced to listening Paris that Marie Louise had given birth to a boy, and Napoleon dreamed that nothing could fail him now, that the future as well as the present had been delivered into his hands :

L'avenir ! l'avenir ! l'avenir est à moi !

' Non ! ' replies the poet :

Non, l'avenir n'est à personne !
Sire, l'avenir est à Dieu !
A chaque fois que l'heure sonne
Tout ici-bas nous dit adieu.
L'avenir ! l'avenir ! mystère !
Toutes les choses de la terre,
Gloire, fortune militaire,
Couronne éclatante des rois,
Victoire aux ailes embrasées,
Ambitions réalisées,
Ne sont jamais sur nous posées
Que comme l'oiseau sur nos toits !

Non, si puissant qu'on soit, non, qu'on rie ou qu'on pleure,
Nul ne te fait parler, nul ne peut avant l'heure
Ouvrir ta froide main,
O fantôme muet, ô notre ombre, ô notre hôte,
Spectre toujours masqué qui nous suis côte à côte,
Et qu'on nomme demain !

. . . . . .

Dieu garde la durée et vous laisse l'espace ;
Vous pouvez sur la terre avoir toute la place,
Être aussi grand qu'un front peut l'être sous le ciel ;
Sire, vous pouvez prendre, à votre fantaisie,
L'Europe à Charlemagne, à Mahomet l'Asie ;—
Mais tu ne prendras pas demain à l'Éternel !

And so the poem goes on to describe, with that rhetoric of Hugo's which has scarcely ever been surpassed, the short and tragic life of the child whose birth seemed to promise such splendours : and then the death of the father in his lonely island, so soon followed, and in a worse kind of exile, by that of the son who inherited nothing from him but his name and his defeat.

There is not very much else about Napoleon in Hugo ; much less, indeed, than one would expect. He appears in the famous opening of the first poem of *Les Feuilles d'Automne*, the volume that came next after the *Orientales* :

Ce siècle avait deux ans. Rome remplaçait Sparte,
Déjà Napoléon perçait sous Bonaparte :

and again in a finer poem, the *Rêverie d'un Passant*, where a ragged old woman turns away from the gala entry of a foreign king visiting the Tuileries with the contemptuous

Un roi ! sous l'empereur, j'en ai tant vu, des rois !

But the subject of the poem, which ends with another magnificent simile of democracy coming in like the tide on the shore, is not Napoleon but the People. Then he is the central figure of the tremendous ' Expiation ' of *Les Châtiments* where, conscious all through his life of a sin for which he must pay the penalty, he thinks first that the Russian

retreat, then that Waterloo, then that St. Helena, is the destined punishment, but on each occasion he hears a voice which says No ; and it is only when he has slept some twelve years in the Invalides in peace and glory, that he is awakened to know the real horror which is to be his true penalty : the unutterable shame of finding his name and fame degraded into being the accomplices of Napoleon III. And there is *Le Retour de l'Empereur*, to speak of nothing else, in the vast *Légende des Siècles*. This is the bringing back of the body from St. Helena, and contains some fine verses on the theme of

> mais, ô mon capitaine,
> Vous ne l'entendrez point,—

and some lovely stanzas on the grave at St. Helena lying solitary and silent under the stars of a tropical night. These last show Hugo on the heights where only the greatest can follow him : but the poem is not improved by the ridiculous flatteries of France which it contains : and on the whole this funeral of Napoleon is a long way from being able to bear the comparisons which an Englishman cannot avoid making, whether with Tennyson's Wellington or Whitman's Lincoln.

But it is time to turn to English poetry. Of course none of the contemporary poets, or perhaps none except Keats, can altogether escape Napoleon. He filled too large a space in their world for that, whether as man of destiny, man of genius, hero, tyrant, or nursery bogy. But somehow they failed to make very much of him. There is Campbell's *Napoleon and the British Sailor* which children used to be made to learn by heart. But it is a mere pretty story. Campbell has done no more for it than could have been done by the 'unknown Englishman long resident at Boulogne' from whom he heard it. It is the Whig tradition of Napoleon, employing the method of the picturesque and pathetic. So

Southey gives us nothing but the Tory tradition of him, employing the rhetoric of the pulpit :

> But Evil was his Good,
> For all too long in blood had he been nurst,
> And ne'er was earth with verier tyrant curst.
> Bold man and bad,
> Remorseless, godless, full of fraud and lies,—

and so on through a good many stanzas of assertions which may or may not be all true but certainly contain a good deal more truth than poetry.

Scott, who wrote Napoleon's Life, has little to say of him in his verse. He appears in *The Vision of Don Roderick* as the destined scourge of Spain, treacherous and heartless. But the only striking lines about him are those which say of his attitude towards his brother Joseph :

> Not that he loved him—No—in no man's weal,
> Scarce in his own, e'er joyed that sullen heart.

Then, of course, one turns to *The Field of Waterloo* expecting something. But that poem is one of Scott's poorest performances and has little in it about Napoleon except reproaches that he did not die on the field or even risk his life as Wellington did.

It is surprising that Wordsworth, the spiritual antipodes of Napoleon, has so little to say about his great enemy. What there is comes rather from the prophet than the poet. The profoundest of all Wordsworth's beliefs was that this world is the battlefield of moral forces, and that behind the apparently impassive face of Nature was concealed a sympathy with Truth and Right. That faith forbade him ever for a moment to doubt the ultimate downfall of Napoleon. Again and again in his sonnets he insists on the reasonableness, necessity, and duty of hope : of hope

> the paramount duty that Heaven lays,
> For its own honour, on man's suffering heart.

Do we believe, he asks, that there is a Godhead in Nature and in the soul of man ? Then, if we do,

> Winds blow, and waters roll,
> Strength to the brave, and Power and Deity.

A man of this sort could feel nothing but contempt when he saw Napoleon's English worshippers hurrying to France during the Peace of Amiens :

> Lords, lawyers, statesmen, squires of low degree,
> Men known and men unknown, sick, lame, and blind,
> Post forward all, like creatures of one kind,
> With first-fruit offerings crowd to bend the knee
> In France, before the new-born Majesty.

In his eyes such men were born slaves ' men of prostrate mind ' ; justly to be scorned by one

> who, caring not for Pope,
> Consul or King, can sound himself to know
> The destiny of Man, and live in hope.

For him it was a certainty that such a mere adventurer as Napoleon, vowed not to Law or Right, but only to Fortune, must even now live a life of

> Internal darkness and unquiet breath :
> And, if old judgments keep their sacred course,
> Him from that height shall Heaven precipitate
> By violent and ignominious death.

Yet faith and hope are never easy virtues, and not even Wordsworth found them so. They must be mingled with fear, purified by humility, and taught to look for their only absolutely certain victory not on this visible scene at all, but in a world of spiritual and immortal realities. This is really the theme of the most Napoleonic of his sonnets :

> When, looking on the present face of things,
> I see one man, of men the meanest too !
> Raised up to sway the world, to do, undo,
> With mighty Nations for his underlings,
> The great events with which old story rings
> Seem vain and hollow : I find nothing great :
> Nothing is left which I can venerate ;

So that a doubt almost within me springs
Of Providence, such emptiness at length
Seems at the heart of all things. But, great God!
I measure back the steps which I have trod;
And tremble, seeing whence proceeds the strength
Of such poor Instruments, with thoughts sublime
I tremble at the sorrow of the time.

Faith and hope are to work in this world and try to realize themselves in this world. But when this visible earth and mortal flesh fail them they have their own assurance that that failure is only part of the truth. And so when Napoleon's victory seems most complete and, indeed, almost universal, they can still say

That an accursèd thing it is to gaze
On prosperous tyrants with a dazzled eye;

as even defeat and death had not been able to prevent their still crying to Toussaint l'Ouverture;

thou hast great allies:
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

When we turn from Wordsworth to Byron we find ourselves of course in a totally different atmosphere. Byron looks on Napoleon with European, not with merely English, eyes as Wordsworth sometimes does; and he cares nothing at heart for moral issues, everything for political. He is as willing as Wordsworth to call Napoleon a tyrant and he has something of Wordsworth's conviction that when freedom is true to itself it is invincible. But with him the belief is much more intellectual than moral or spiritual. The stupidity of the old system, and of the kings, priests and politicians whom it fostered, fills him full of intellectual scorn, and sends him to sympathy with anybody, even a new kind of tyrant, who will break it to pieces. Then he was an aristocrat, and made rather vulgarly aware of his rank and wealth by the fact that his childhood had neither been very dignified nor very comfortable. And he was an exiled aristocrat. After a few years of intoxicating success

his own world had cast him out : after which it was with him as it is with most ostracized members of aristocracies : one does not know which he had most of, hatred of his order or pride in belonging to it. The result of this jumble of feelings—liberal sympathies, hatred of hypocrisy, intellectual contempt, aristocratic insolence, and a desire to pay back old scores—could not be a very coherent poetic handling of the Revolution or Napoleon. And it is not. Byron has not very much to say about Napoleon and what he says is not very remarkable. The *Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte* is full of telling rhetoric, but not of much else. It is full of scorn for the man who could survive his fall ; and the scorn has a moral judgement in it :

> All Evil Spirit as thou art,
> It is enough to grieve the heart
> To see thine own unstrung ;
> To think that God's fair world hath been
> The footstool of a thing so mean.

As a whole the ode is rather schoolboyish, at once careless and declamatory. And no schoolboy would need a master to keep him from such a lapse as that ' like he of Babylon ' into which Byron presently falls.

Much more memorable than this is the famous Waterloo passage in the third canto of *Childe Harold*. The character of Napoleon with which it ends is neither commonplace nor unjust. It is too long to quote, but the essence of it lies in stanza xxxvi :

> There sunk the greatest nor the worst of men,
> Whose spirit antithetically mixt
> One moment of the mightiest, and again
> On little objects with like firmness fixt ;
> Extreme in all things ! hadst thou been betwixt,
> Thy throne had still been thine, or never been ;
> For daring made thy rise as fall ; thou seek'st
> Even now to reassume the imperial mien,
> And shake again the world, the Thunderer of the scene !

And stanza xli shows that Byron had noticed that characteristic of Napoleon which Scott, calling it his great error,

described as ' a continued obtrusion on mankind of his want of all community of feeling for or with them '. If you are Alexander, as Byron says, you cannot afford to play the part of Diogenes. But the most fatal quality of all, the one which most prevented his consolidating his power, was that to which Byron alludes in stanza xlii :

> But quiet to quick bosoms is a hell,
> And *there* hath been thy bane : there is a fire
> And motion of the soul which will not dwell
> In its own narrow being, but aspire
> Beyond the fitting medium of desire ;
> And, but once kindled, quenchless evermore,
> Preys upon high adventure, nor can tire
> Of aught but rest ; a fever at the core,
> Fatal to him who bears, to all who ever bore.

Later on, in 1823, after he had written most of *Don Juan*, Byron returned to Napoleon in *The Age of Bronze*. The mood is now the mood of *Don Juan*, one of disgust at the European reaction, and generally of cynical contempt for all human kind. The contempt is, of course, chiefly of the Monarchs of the Congress of Vienna and their subsequent doings. But Napoleon gets his share, though the gulf between them is measured at once in the witty motto prefixed to the poem : 'Impar *Congressus* Achilli'. The kings are scorned for playing at being what they could not be, but Napoleon for failing to be what he might have been :

> But where is he, the modern, mightier far,
> Who, born no king, made monarchs draw his car ;
> The new Sesostris, whose unharness'd kings,
> Freed from the bit, believe themselves with wings ?
> . . . . . .
> Behold the grand result in yon lone isle,
> And, as thy nature urges, weep or smile.
> Sigh to behold the eagle's lofty rage,
> Reduced to nibble at his narrow cage ;
> Smile to survey the queller of the nations
> Now daily squabbling o'er disputed rations :
> . . . . . .

How, if that soaring spirit still retain
A conscious twilight of his blazing reign,
How must he smile, on looking down, to see
The little that he was and sought to be !

. . . . . .

Ye Alps, which view'd him in his dawning flights
Hover, the victor of a hundred fights !
Thou Rome, who saw'st thy Caesar's deeds outdone !
Alas ! why pass'd he too the Rubicon—
The Rubicon of man's awaken'd rights,—
To herd with vulgar kings and parasites ?

. . . . . .

A single step into the right had made
This man the Washington of worlds betray'd ;
A single step into the wrong has given
His name a doubt to all the winds of heaven ;
The reed of Fortune, and of thrones the rod,
Of Fame the Moloch or the demigod ;
His country's Caesar, Europe's Hannibal,
Without their decent dignity of fall.

The feeling of Byron about Napoleon seems to have been made up of two things : generous indignation at his betrayal of liberty, and the impatience of genius at the sight of kindred genius overthrown by massed stupidity.

There is little about Napoleon in Shelley. No one was ever less likely than Shelley to be dazzled by, or even interested in, mere success or mere ability. He was no more susceptible than Wordsworth to the attraction of worldly power and splendour. Only two of his poems deal directly with Napoleon. The sonnet on his fall which begins 'I hated thee, fallen tyrant', is chiefly remarkable for its singular denunciation of Napoleon as 'a most unambitious slave' which no subsequent explanation can render less than startling. To the *Lines written on hearing the News of the Death of Napoleon* allusion has already been made, in connexion with Manzoni's *Il Cinque Maggio*. Shelley's question, 'What, alive and so bold, O Earth ?' is very near Manzoni's.

But the answer which he puts into earth's mouth is pure Shelley. It belongs to that universalism of birth and death and eternal recurrence which was so favourite an idea of his. Alone of the poets of his day he fully grasped the conception that Nature knows no death, only perpetual change and transformation. So here earth hurls back the charge of boldness as born of ignorance :

' Who has known me of old ? ' replied Earth,
' Or who has my story told ?
It is thou who art over-bold.'
And the lightning of scorn laughed forth
As she sung, ' To my bosom I fold
All my sons when their knell is knolled,
And so with living motion all are fed,
And the quick spring like weeds out of the dead.'

With Shelley we pass away from the poets who were Napoleon's contemporaries. Tennyson and Browning were children when he died. They contribute very little to the literature of Napoleon. Tennyson has nothing but the sonnet *Buonaparte* (' He thought to quell the stubborn hearts of oak '), at once so insolently English in tone, so fine, and so characteristically Tennysonian, in technique and in phrasing. Browning, so far as I remember, has only the *Incident of the French Camp*, as characteristic of him as the sonnet is of Tennyson. It has one of those sudden flashes of truth of which no one has more than he : ' I'm killed, Sire ! ' ; two at least of those bits of journalism or mere padding—' my army-leader Lannes ' and ' your flag-bird '—of which he would never take the trouble to purge his verses ; and a picture of Napoleon which, as so often with him, combines the subtle and the grotesque :

With neck out-thrust, you fancy how,
Legs wide, arms locked behind,
As if to balance the prone brow
Oppressive with its mind.

There remain the two greatest appearances of Napoleon in English poetry. He is necessarily the central figure in Mr. Hardy's *The Dynasts*; and if all its figures, even his, are reduced in scale by being seen, according to the unique design of this strange drama, from a point of view outside time and space, yet his still remains the greatest of them. And the actors in the drama are themselves unconscious of being only puppets in a show, and take themselves, and especially their greatest, as both realities and wills. Otherwise, of course, there could have been no drama at all. For drama is action and action is will; will conditioned and limited, no doubt, by other wills and by forces too great to be ordinarily called by that name, but yet will which at least struggles if it does not achieve. So in *The Dynasts* we see Pitt, Nelson, Wellington, Alexander, and, above all, Napoleon, desiring, struggling, and in part achieving. But, for whatever reason, these great historical figures are, on the whole, far less successful creations in Mr. Hardy's hands than the crowds, the common soldiers and the obscure people. There is the old difficulty, of course, only surmounted perhaps by Shakespeare and Scott, that the more history has to say the less chance has imagination, which is the voice of poetry, to get a word in. Then there is the difficulty inherent in the very scheme conceived by Mr. Hardy. The Spirits of the Years and the Pities and the rest dwarf the great men more than they can dwarf the already insignificant. But the chief cause of the comparative failure of Napoleon and his peers is that great men who appear in poetry require great poetry to clothe them. And Mr. Hardy, except here and there, especially in some of the lyrics, has elected not to be a poet in *The Dynasts*. The power of his mind is felt always, and that of his imagination often; his purely poetic gift scarcely ever. What is printed as poetry is often the merest prose arranged as blank verse: as when Nelson is made to say:

So far your thoughtful and sagacious words
Have hit the facts :

and even a chorus is given such lines as

And rendez-vous westerly straightway
With Spain's aiding navies
And hasten to head violation
Of Albion's frontier.

Napoleon necessarily suffers like the rest from all these drawbacks. On the whole, what we get of him is his worst, not his best. We get very little of the man of the *carrière ouverte*, of tireless industry, of solitary and unparalleled efficiency ; little of the reformer of law and administration, of the visionary who had great and not always wholly selfish dreams, of the voice at whose call so many old things came alive again, so many new were born. But we get his vulgarity in and after the scene with Queen Louise ; his meanness, what in English is most exactly called his caddishness, in the scene with Josephine ; his utter heartlessness in that with Marie Louise after Moscow ; his ignoble lack of dignity in the journey to Elba, when, in terror of the Avignon mob, he offers to mount the white cockade. All these touches are too horribly well founded. But they do not give the whole of Napoleon. The nearest we get to that is his final soliloquy :

If but a Kremlin cannon-shot had met me,
My greatness would have stood : I should have scored
A vast repute, scarce paralleled in time.
As it did not, the fates had served me best
If in the thick and thunder of to-day,
Like Nelson, Harold, Hector, Cyrus, Saul,
I had been shifted from this jail of flesh,
To wander as a greatened ghost elsewhere.
—Yes, a good death, to have died on yonder field ;
But never a ball came passing down my way !
So, as it is, a miss-mark they will dub me ;
And yet—I found the crown of France in the mire,
And with the point of my prevailing sword

I picked it up ! But for all this and this
I shall be nothing. . . .
To shoulder Christ from out the topmost niche
In human fame, as once I fondly felt,
Was not for me. I came too late in time
To assume the prophet or the demi-god,
A part past playing now. My only course
To make good showance to posterity
Was to implant my line upon the throne.
And how shape that, if now extinction nears ?
Great men are meteors that consume themselves
To light the earth. This is my burnt-out hour.

But on that follows the comment of the Spirit of the Years :

Such men as thou, who wade across the world
To make an epoch, bless, confuse, appal,
Are in the elemental ages' chart
Like meanest insects on obscurest leaves,
But incidents and tools of Earth's unfolding ;
Or as the brazen rod that stirs the fire
Because it must.

Note that Mr. Hardy never falls into Tolstoy's folly of supposing that the brazen rod does not stir the fire. He only says that it stirs because it must. He knows well enough that a great general is everything to an army, a great statesman to a people ; only he supposes the general and the statesman, for all their potent and deciding genius, to be the instrument of Something which neither they, nor their worshippers, nor their victims, perceive. And even that Something speaks through different voices, now of Irony, now of Pity, and hardly knows what It does. It seems to give no definite answer to its own question :

The which is seemlier ? So-called ancient order,
Or that the red-breath'd war-horse prance unreined ?

Still the last word is given to the voices of Pity and Hope, who declare that it is only Napoleon who has failed ;

The pale pathetic peoples still plod on
Through hoodwinkings to light !

and close the whole with their song of faith :

But—a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages
Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that were,
Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair !

But the greatest appearance that Napoleon has yet made in our poetry is unquestionably to be found in that astonishing poem which is the second of Meredith's four *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History*. In Mr. Hardy's stupendous Epic-drama the Universe, or rather something beyond the Universe, a Fate outside and above Time and Space, is in a sense the only real Actor : and of the human actors all, even Napoleon himself, exhibit a disillusioning pettiness. To the understanding of Napoleon, the poet of *The Dynasts* contributes nothing. With Meredith it is just the opposite. His ode is a storm of tremendous, almost furious, energy, flash following flash, the lightning of intellect and imagination searching out and illuminating all dark and doubtful places in Napoleon's character and career. The result is not only a great poem ; it is perhaps the best of all estimates of Napoleon. To find anything equally true and full, anything so many-sided in its justice, anything so illuminating in thought and brilliant in phrase, one has to go to prose books of ten times its length, and perhaps to go in vain.

Unfortunately the ode is one of the extremest examples of Meredith's involved and tortuous obscurity. The first reading of it is apt to leave the reader faint and gasping, a weary traveller struggling through an impenetrable forest under a midnight thunderstorm, seeing nothing of his path but what is shown him for an instant, and only for an instant, by flashes of lightning which daze as much as they illumine.

But for those who will take the trouble there is a path through the jungle, and it is worth finding. His *Napoleon* is not the finest of the four odes ; that is *France 1870*, which is less a thing of pure intellect, more a thing combined and fused of heart and head. There Mr. Hardy's *Pities* get their hearing, as they always should ; while they hardly get it at all in the steely brilliance of the *Napoleon*. But it would be difficult to name a poem of equal length to the making of which such an output of brains has gone. From the first word to the last it is an unresting torrent of thought, insight, and judgement. The previous ode, *The Revolution*, had ended with the picture of the bride of Liberty draining the fatal cup of victory and becoming intoxicated by it into the acceptance of

> The thing most loathed, the iron lord,
> Controller and chastiser, under Victory masked.

And so this ode begins with his coming :

> Cannon his name,
> Cannon his voice, he came.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> To weld the nation in a name of dread,
> And scatter carrion flies off wounds unhealed,
> The Necessitated came.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Globe, sceptre, sword, to enfold, to rule, to smite,
> Make unity of the mass,
> Coherent or refractory, by his might.

The ode goes on to trace, stage by stage, the relations between France and Napoleon. She, the slave of the old *régime*, the freed bride of the Revolution, hung now on the looks of the master by whom she had been 'rescued from vivisectionist and knave' ; and gave him 'as much of heart as abjects can' ; and

> Who sprang for Liberty once, found slavery sweet.

She 'blew to deafness' the fluttering bird-voice of liberty

which still cried in her heavens : drowned it in the roar of her master's cannon. For now

> Cannon mastered her soul, and all dreams had end.

But soon she felt

> A bodeful drain of blood illume
> Her wits with frosty fire to read
> The dazzling wizard who would have her bleed
> On fruitless marsh and snows of spectral gloom
> For victory that was victory scarce in name ;

and watching the elusive, undefeated English seaman, the ubiquitous English purse, the critic in her revived :

> and dumb in awe reviewed
> This torture, this anointed, this untracked
> To mortal source, this alien of his kind ;
> Creator, slayer, conjuror, Solon-Mars,
> The cataract of the abyss, the star of stars ;
> Whose arts to lay the senses under spell
> Aroused an insurrectionary mind.

So Meredith pictures France's feelings about Napoleon. The next section gives us his about her : perhaps the finest and subtlest of all the fine and subtle things in the ode.

> He, did he love her ? France was his weapon, shrewd
> At edge, a wind in onset ; he loved well
> His tempered weapon, with the which he hewed
> Clean to the ground impediments, or hacked,
> Sure of the blade that served the great man-miracle.
> He raised her, robed her, gemmed her for his bride,
> Did but her blood in blindness given exact.
> Her blood she gave, was blind to him as guide :
> She quivered at his word, and at his touch
> Was hound or steed for any mark he espied.
> He loved her more than little, less than much.

Again and again it says, in unforgettable and final epigram, the exact truth about Napoleon.

> The common Tyrant's frenzies, rancour, spites,
> He knew as little as men's claim on rights.
> A kindness for old servants, early friends,
> Was constant in him while they served his ends.
> . . . . . .

The statesman steered the despot to large tasks ;
The despot drove the statesman on short roads.
For Order's cause he laboured, as inclined
A soldier's training and his Euclid mind.

And so ' France had sense of vacancy in Light ', and she sees that the ' hugest of engines ' is ' a much limited man ' :

A heart but to propel Leviathan ;
A spirit that breathed but in earth's atmosphere.

But his victories can still silence the critic's voice. He remained, after all, the ' supreme player of man's primaeval game ' ; and

The daemon filled him, and he filled her sons ;
Strung them to stature over human height.

So that she,

The lost to honour, in his glory clothed,

drowns her memories, and struggles not to

worship less
Than ere she bled on sands or snows and knew
The slave's alternative, to worship or to rue !

But victory did not follow him for ever ; and at last the end came ; and he knew it was the end, but would not acknowledge it ; and

Fighting against an end he could discern,
The chivalry whereof he had none
He called from his worn slave's abundant springs.

And her chivalry did not fail him ;

He won his harnessed victim's rapturous shout
When every move was mortal to her frame.

But in vain ;

The innumerable whelmed him, and he fell.

He fell from power, but not from memory ; forgetfulness and he could have nothing in common :

His name on silence thundered, on the obscure
Lightened ; it haunted morn and even-song ;
Earth of her prodigy's extinction long,
With shudderings and with thrillings, hung unsure.

That is perhaps the truest as well as the finest thing poetry has yet said about Napoleon. But, as it tells us itself, it will not be the last. There is much that we may condemn in Napoleon, much that we may hate, some things, even, that we may despise. But ignored or forgotten he never can be. We may think of him as a Satan, but as 'less than Archangel ruined' we cannot think of him. So glorious a promise cannot be altogether extinguished by any after-disappointment: so prodigious a human miracle can never undergo the oblivion which is the fate of common men.

Of such a man poetry can never have said her last word. Perhaps she has not yet got far enough away from him to see him as he will be seen by an ultimate posterity. The Giant and his victims are still too near her; and terror, hate and righteous indignation make him seem only a Monster. But a day may come when distance will have dissolved terror and compelled even the justest indignation to yield at least a little to the enchantment of the Giant's strength and beauty, and sometimes to forget the use which he too often made of them.

POETRY AND COMMONPLACE[1]

My distinguished predecessor in the office of Warton Lecturer to the Academy took as his subject 'Poetry and Time'. Nervous persons when they saw that title announced may have feared that he was intending to enter the fiercely contested lists in which the combatants pound each other with rival definitions and contradictory assertions—all alike declared to be the obvious truth—about metre and rhythm, stress and pause and quantity, and the like. But their alarms proved needless. Sir Henry Newbolt was too conscious of the *genius loci*, of the Olympian or Elysian dignity of the British Academy, to come to metrical fisticuffs with any one in its presence. What he gave us was a discourse on the relation of poetry to the ideas of Time and Eternity. It is not for his successor to praise his lecture: it may be excusable for him to lament that it set a standard which one who has not the smallest pretensions to be either poet or philosopher finds it impossible to follow. I do not know whether it is or was my duty to try to follow it: but some cynic said that one's duty is the thing which it is one's nature not to do; and on this occasion, if that is my duty, I confess I am not going to try to do it.

I am going to attempt to say something on a humbler topic, the relation of poetry to commonplace. At first sight it might seem that there can be no relation at all between them; that one is exclusive of the other. For is it not of the essence of poetry to possess distinction and rarity, that subtle heightening of thought, emotion, and of the language expressing them, which arrests the mind and quickens the imagination? Is not poetry the finest of the fine arts, and

[1] This was the Warton Lecture on English Poetry delivered before the British Academy 26th November 1919. A very few corrections and additions are now inserted.

is it not the very business of the fine arts to do something which has to be done in such a way that the doing of it becomes a delight to the doer and a wonder as well as a delight to the spectator; to make something which is useful in such fashion that its use is almost forgotten in its beauty: or, if we come closer to the exact work of poetry, to say something worth saying with such perfection that there is in it music as well as truth, a vision as well as a fact, eternity as well as time: to say it in such a way that in its wisdom there is a felicity, half sensuous and half spiritual, which, transcending joy and deeper than sorrow, is capable of transmuting both into itself. All this is as unlike what we mean by commonplace as anything can be. Of the history of that word there is no need to say much. It was the translation of the Latin *locus communis* and meant a theme or truth of general application. And so it naturally came to be applied in two ways, in a good sense and in a bad, not distinguished so clearly as they should be in the Oxford Dictionary. In the good sense it meant a great saying of universal application, such a saying as was worth setting down in what was called a commonplace book. In the bad or depreciatory sense it meant universality without greatness: it meant something trite and obvious: such a saying as 'strength diminishes in old age', or 'life and property are safer in peace than in war'. This is the ordinary use of the word to-day. And in that restricted sense commonplace can have very little to do with poetry. But if the word be taken in its other sense I venture to assert that it would be scarcely an exaggeration to say that the greater the poet the fuller he is of commonplace. For, as Aristotle knew and Wordsworth reasserted, poetry deals above all with truth, and, of all sorts of truth, with that which is most universal, which is precisely the stuff of commonplace. That death is certain and friendship uncertain are commonplaces of the baser sort when Shakespeare intends them to be so, as when

he makes Shallow say 'Death is certain' without really thinking about death at all: or when Byron allows them to be so, as when he writes in one of his earlier poems such poor stuff as:

> But Friendship can vary her gentle dominion;
> The attachment of years in a moment expires.

Born as wisdom or poetry on the lips of some primitive poet, they have been worn to death by the generations of men, and leave those who now hear them as cold as themselves. But when Shakespeare applies his power to them they rise again and their resurrection is life and immortality:

> Thou common friend, that 's without faith or love;
> For such is a friend now; . . .
> I dare not say
> I have one friend alive; thou wouldst disprove me.
> Who should be trusted now, when one's right hand
> Is perjured to the bosom?
> . . . . . .
> Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
> So do our minutes hasten to their end.

Where is the commonplace when we hear that voice? And yet what can be a greater platitude than that every moment of our lives brings us nearer to death? The truth then must be that both the word commonplace and the thing it represents have more in them than we at first sight allow. To get the whole truth about them we need the old good meaning of the word as well as the later bad meaning. A commonplace may be obvious, but it may be also a universal truth, and as great as universal; only that its universality and universal acceptance have now blinded us to its greatness. Often enough the obviousness which we see is an accident, an excrescence, an obscuring overgrowth: the essence is life for him who can discover it. And what I am going to suggest is that one of the functions of poetry is just this, to discover the life that lies concealed in what are called commonplaces: to take a commonplace in the later sense

of the word and turn it into one in the earlier and finer sense : to take a platitude and make of it an aphorism : to rub off the accumulated rust of time and familiarity which prevents our seeing the fresh and vital truth underneath : to speak of a mother's love, or of the sadness of autumn, in such a way that we may feel them as we may suppose them to have been felt by those who first put such feelings into words, words which for them were as fresh and forcible as the feelings, but have now for us become stale and lifeless.

Some of the great poets have themselves recognized something of this sort. Keats remarked that the finest passages in the poets impress us as being both known before and for the first time. Wordsworth says that the business of poetry is not so much the discovery of new truths as the giving of new life to old ones. This is perhaps going too far. It is half the truth, not the whole. Poetry has, it would rather seem, two functions with regard to truth : its discovery and its re-discovery. The great poet, that is, is sometimes creating and inventing, giving us new thoughts or pictures ; and sometimes restating old ones in such a way that it appears as if we were hearing them for the first time. His originality is of this double kind ; an originality of substance and an originality of form. The one originates something new, the other re-creates something old. Now we think of invention as the central and dominant quality of a poet, and so perhaps it is. Yet it is seldom employed, especially by the greatest men, in the finding out of any new substance either of story or of thought. We see the same thing wherever we look. Pindar, the most splendid of Greek poets, is essentially a teller of old stories and a repeater of old saws. The Greek tragedians in the building of their dramas ring the changes on the legends of a few famous families. Virgil is often said by those who do not understand poetry to have nothing of his own because his story is all taken from Homer and other Greek writers. The wisdom of Dante is often

a word for word translation of Aristotle or St. Thomas Aquinas. Even the fierce independence of Milton reproduces the Bible with reverent docility. And Shakespeare himself ? Not only is it notorious that, like Molière, Racine, and the Greeks, he was seldom at the pains to invent a new plot, but even in the field of reflection, of the statement and discussion of truth, that prodigious knowledge and intellectual fertility of his is far less often occupied in telling us something which we have never been told before than in recoining the old gold of human wisdom in his own splendid mind with his royal features stamped upon it. That is, of the two poetic functions I spoke of, he is really, if we look into him closely, less concerned with discovery than with re-discovery. In fact, to confess the truth, when I turned over in my mind those I remembered of his great sayings to find one that was new, that was an original invention, I was astonished to see how few would pass any at all searching test in that respect. Of course it is very difficult to define originality. When Shakespeare speaks of judgement or the power of the human mind as that ' without the which we are pictures or mere beasts ' he had no doubt been anticipated by previous writers. But to himself and to most of us he seems to be pointing out for the first time the awful truth that only by our possession of reason, which we may and which some of us do lose, are we subjects and not mere objects : that it alone distinguishes us from the world of material nature which consists of objects or pictures without self-determination or even life of their own : or at best from the beasts, which are more than pictures because they have life of a kind, but not the only life we can value, the life of a free agent, freely chosen. A more definitely original thing is perhaps what he says of love :

' This is the monstruosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined, that the desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit.'

These may be instances of true discovery; of course hundreds of other and better ones could be found. But how much easier it is to find instances of what I call re-discovery! A large majority of his most famous and most quoted sayings belong to that other order of poetic greatness. They crowd upon us all at once:

> for to be wise and love
> Exceeds man's might: that dwells with gods above.

What can be a triter theme that the opposition of love and wisdom?

Again:

> There 's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

What is older than the thought of a guiding and shaping Providence?

Or, once more,

> There 's such divinity doth hedge a king.

Is not the sacro-sanctity of royalty a commonplace of as hoary an antiquity as the very institution of monarchy itself? Though we may remark in passing that there is something like originality in placing this claim of divinity for kingship in the mouth of the worst of all Shakespeare's kings. And the same prevalence of re-discovery over discovery will probably be found in most poets. Keats has been called by good judges the most Shakespearean of Shakespeare's successors. The likeness is rather in power of language than in power of thought. That is an obvious consequence of the age at which Keats died. So with him re-discovery will abound over discovery even more than with Shakespeare. For one originality like

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty: that is all
> Ye know on earth and all ye need to know;

(which, by the way, he puts almost better in one of his letters, 'What the imagination seizes as beauty must be

truth '), we get a hundred re-discovered commonplaces, like the most famous of all his lines, ' A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'

And so I think it will be found to be with nearly all poets, and particularly with the greatest. The work they are most commonly engaged in is especially that consecration of the commonplace, that making poetry out of old truth and ordinary life which some good judges have thought the greater of the two halves of the genius of Wordsworth : that enabling us to feel that truth is not dead but alive ; to see the 'impassioned expression ' which, in Wordsworth's own words, so carefully chosen and so profoundly believed, is in ' the countenance of all science ' : to know things, but not merely to know them, to have that perception of them which he called ' the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge ', a perception which is poetry or the revelation which poetry alone can bring.

It is this function of poetry of which I am going to try to speak. Indeed it is a function of more than poets. Johnson said that men more commonly require to be reminded than to be informed. Indeed it is a constant part of the business of all good writers and speakers to tell people what they know already. But the poet, of course, does it as no one else can do it. His readers have passed a hedgerow or a wood-side every day of their lives : he can make them for the first time really see it. They know in an indifferent sort of way that they are to die ; he comes upon them with his

Death lays his icy hand on kings :

or his

atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale ;

and they know it with a cold shudder of personal fear or a quick movement of universal tenderness. They believe in the promise of spring, but how much they believe in it they only realize when they hear the poet crying :

Once more the Heavenly Power
Makes all things new,
And domes the red-plow'd hills
With loving blue ;
The blackbirds have their wills,
The throstles too.

And they love its beauty ; but how much they love it they only know when they hear :

For love is crownéd with the prime
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding-a-ding ding :
Sweet lovers love the spring.

Only the poet can do it after this fashion with stirring of the pulses and quickening of the blood. But the plainest prose has after all to do the same thing in its own measure : ploughing up the soul of knowledge and bringing its buried energy into the fertilizing daylight. The fact that everybody has heard before that God is love is no bar, but quite the contrary, to the preacher who will take that text. And so in matters of literature it is a duty as well as a right to go over old ground. I make, therefore, no apology for my subject to-day.

Let me take some illustrations of what I mean. And first take Wordsworth. From some points of view Wordsworth is the most original of all our poets. No one owes less to his predecessors ; and, of his contemporaries at any rate, none has had anything like so great an influence on his successors. Yet this original and dominant poet, who was first the unacknowledged and then the acknowledged master-force in English poetry for a hundred years, was accused at his first appearance, and not unnaturally, of being commonplace. Both his doctrine and his practice appeared to encourage the accusation. His poetry spoke in plain words to a generation which had long been accustomed to verse which deliberately preferred an artificial language. He dealt with plain topics of universal human life, especially peasant life, and totally

avoided and indeed scorned the genteel and the polite. It is not only that he could not have written *The Rape of the Lock* to save his life: it is also true that he would have hated and despised himself for writing it if he could. He aimed at making poetry out of the universal essence of life, not out of its occasional accidents, and certainly not out of those which in his eyes proceeded from the vanities and trivialities of an artificial mode of life. But this is not all. It is not merely that he disdains the trivial or occasional. He goes farther than that in his new universality. He deliberately subordinates action or situation to the more universal element of feeling. 'The moving accident is not my trade'; or, as he puts it in the prose of the great Preface, it is not the action and situation which, in his poems, give importance to the feeling, but on the contrary the feeling which gives importance to the action and situation. He declares that 'the end of poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure'; and he insists that 'the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants', and that 'one being is elevated above another in proportion as he possesses this capability'. This was what he set himself to demonstrate in his poetry; what he has successfully demonstrated for over a hundred years to many thousands of men and women.

But it is obvious that this avoidance of 'gross and violent stimulants', this deliberate selection of ordinary life as the subject of poetry, would expose the poet to unpopularity and ridicule, and especially to the charge of dullness, obviousness and commonplace. Every reader of *Marmion* or *The Bride of Abydos* was immediately capable of being excited by them by virtue of their 'moving accidents'. This was by no means the case with *The Leech Gatherer* or *The White Doe of Rylstone*. Yet I think there is no doubt that Wordsworth, in these poems and others of the same

kind, shows greater poetic power and achieves a greater result than is achieved in *The Bride* or even in *Marmion*. The emotional excitement produced by the strange adventures which make the interest of those poems, however sincere, is trivial and superficial compared with that produced by the best poems of Wordsworth. Wordsworth asks no adventitious support from exceptional events or actions. He chooses the commonplace stuff of human life and sets himself to reveal its depths. He paid the penalty of his courage in his own day and he pays it still. The surface of the commonplace is so familiar that men saw and see nothing else : they do not look below it. But the genius and the persistence of Wordsworth win their reward in the end : and our eyes are opened, as he meant to open them, to see the mystery and the greatness of common life. He says in the Preface that a poet is ' a man who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him ', and that he is endowed with a greater knowledge of human nature and more enthusiasm and tenderness than is common among mankind. It is this force of joy and tenderness—in a word, of imaginative sympathy—which he applies to all the commonplace world of action, thought and being, whether animate or inanimate, till he is able to say with utter and absolute sincerity such things as :

> To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

I do not say that this consecration, or perhaps revivification or recreation, of the commonplace is Wordsworth's greatest achievement. A greater still may probably be the strangeness and novelty of his genius to which many people are blind, his strong grasp of certain great and original ideas, and his poetic expression of them, which is often, though by no means always, of supreme felicity. But I must not speak of this either in his case or in the case of other poets whom

I shall mention, not I hope because I am wanting in the sense of its importance, but for the simple reason that it is not my subject to-day. The other is more than enough to occupy all my time. And indeed, whichever side of Wordsworth's poetic achievement be intrinsically the greater, it is probable that he lives to-day less by his original creative side, the side of discovery, as I called it, than by his singular genius for re-discovery, by his gift for making the dry bones of all sorts of commonplace live, the commonplaces of life, of language, and of thought. For instance, it is probably to this side more than to the other that he owes the distinction, which he is said to possess, of being the most quoted of all English poets except Shakespeare and Pope.

Let me give one or two illustrations. Take such an entirely Wordsworthian poem as *The Reverie of Poor Susan*. When I said just now that Wordsworth disdained the trivial and occasional, that may have sounded absurd. He has always been attacked by people who do not look below the surface for the triviality of such poems as *We are Seven*, *The Idiot Boy*, *Simon Lee*, *Poor Susan*, and others. But look a little closely at the thing. See what he does with such a mere commonplace of experience as the sudden and moving memories of childhood which may be aroused in middle life and in totally different circumstances by the occurrence of some apparently trivial event which touches the cord of communication. We all know this. But what does Wordsworth make of it ? I have heard the poem derided : I have seen a young critic say that a French prose translation of it was finer than the original. It is not possible in my judgement to go wider of the critical mark. The truth is that neither this nor the others which I have mentioned are trivial poems. Their obviousness and commonplaceness is on the surface : the essence of them is the reverse of trivial or commonplace : it is moving and profound. The one of them most open to attack, *The Idiot Boy*, may be garrulous and

ill-composed, but a poem of trivial subject it is not. Those who say so can, it seems to me, have no response in them to the call of maternal love, of the special and infinite tenderness there is in a mother's love for the weaker of her children. I know no poem that has more of that in it. It is a little bit of true human life : a little comedy and tragedy in one. A trivial poem is quite a different thing ; a very delightful thing at its best, but a thing utterly different from the poems of Wordsworth. It is made out of a trivial or ordinary circumstance : the cutting off of a lock of hair, the drowning of a cat in a tub of goldfish, the appearance of a viper in a garden : all these are trivial circumstances and give rise, in the hands of Pope and Gray and Cowper, to trivial poems. The fact that one of the three poems is a masterpiece and that they are all delightful does not prevent them from all three being trivial treatments of trivial subjects. In form and execution, of course, *The Rape* is the opposite of trivial ; it is consummate. Incidentally, too, it illustrates my theme today if Johnson was right in saying that in it new things were made familiar and familiar things new. But, for very good reasons, it never leaves the world of trifling : to have gone below the surface of things, to have made any appeal to high or serious emotion, would have defeated its object. Trivial, therefore, it remains, in subject, in temper, in treatment. On the other hand, in *The Reverie of Poor Susan* only the occasion of the poem, the outward circumstance, is trivial ; and that Wordsworth, by his treatment of it, at once transforms from its triviality. The poem itself is not trivial at all. For myself I can only say that after his twenty or thirty greatest it is one of those I would least willingly lose.

I am going to take the liberty of reading it.

At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight appears,
Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for three years :
Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

'Tis a note of enchantment ; what ails her ? She sees
A mountain ascending, a vision of trees ;
Bright volumes of vapour through Lothbury glide,
And a river flows on through the vale of Cheapside.

Green pastures she views in the midst of the dale,
Down which she so often has tripped with her pail ;
And a single small cottage, a nest like a dove's,
The one only dwelling on earth that she loves.

She looks, and her heart is in heaven : but they fade,
The mist and the river, the hill and the shade :
The stream will not flow, and the hill will not rise,
And the colours have all passed away from her eyes.

Is there anything of Wordsworth's which illustrates better than the truth and beauty of this little poem the choice which he describes himself as making :

> The common growth of mother earth
> Suffices me : her tears, her mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.
>
> The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
> I shall not covet for my dower,
> If I along that lowly way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.

The sympathetic heart is obvious : will any one who stays to let Wordsworth do his work, who listens to the poem in a wise passiveness, and refuses any surrender to that mood which is of all most fatal to poetry, the mood in which simplicity, rusticity, and poverty appear undignified or even trivial subjects, doubt for more than a moment that the 'soul of power' is there also ? Will any one deny that the poet who does what he does here was the right poet to draw the distinction implied in those lines which are among the most familiar of all the popular quotations he supplies :

> A primrose by a river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.

The essential business of Wordsworth was to make a prim-

rose by a river's brim more than that to every one who reads : to bring out the strangeness of the common, the interestingness and newness and significance of the commonplace. This has been well put by Sir Walter Raleigh who speaks of Wordsworth's ' sense of the utter strangeness and foreignness of the most trivial human experiences ' as part of what made him a great poet. No single poet, therefore, is a better illustration of my subject, the poetic use of the commonplace. It runs through all his poetry. He can break from it, as in the great Ode in one way and in *Laodamia* in another, but it is his most peculiar and characteristic work. What can be more commonplace than the weakness of old age ? Yet what power Wordsworth has applied to it, how he has stirred the imagination and the emotions by it without condescending for one moment to the rhetorical or the sentimental, in such things as *The Leech Gatherer*, the *Matthew* poems, and, I do not hesitate to add, *Simon Lee*. There are lapses, I know, in them all ; the greatest of them has the worst, a lapse into that kind of commonplace which is forbidden to poetry, the commonplace of prose :

> And now a stranger's privilege I took,
> And drawing to his side to him did say,
> ' This morning gives us promise of a glorious day ! '

Simon Lee, so often and so unjustly derided, having made its moving picture out of the simplest of figures and the most apparently insignificant of incidents, closes with that great and deep saying :

> Alas ! the gratitude of men
> Hath oftener left me mourning ;

the profoundest particular application of the general truth to which he was giving expression just at the same time in the *Lines written in Early Spring* :

> And much it grieved my heart to think
> What man has made of man.

But if I enlarge further upon Wordsworth I shall seem to suggest that my point is one which concerns him in particular rather than poetry in general. On the contrary, I believe that all through the whole world of poetry it remains true that there are few surer tests of the greatness of a poet than his power to restamp the old currency of commonplace with a new image of his own. What are the things we remember most from the old Hebrew poets? Are they not just expressions of the most universal feelings of simple faith in God: what every one in every nation and creed has felt who has any religion at all? And yet here they are, those old universal commonplaces, of weakness in the presence of Power, of man looking up to something greater than himself on which he rests his hope of protection, here they are, with a special Hebrew note about them, and sometimes, no doubt, the note of an individual poet:

'I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest: for it is thou, Lord, only that makest me dwell in safety.'

'O Lord our Governor, how excellent is thy Name in all the world.'

'God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.'

'Blessed are those that are undefiled in the way and walk in the law of the Lord.'

How old they are! Every nation which gets above mere savagery or barbarous superstition has something that is feeling its way towards such sayings as these. And yet they are Hebrew, not Chinese, nor Indian, nor Greek. And if we knew enough of Hebrew poetry we could probably say that they were this poet and not that. And how their greatness is measured, as I said, by their very commonplaceness! It is because they are so commonplace that they are as real to us as they were to the original Jews who sang them or heard them sung. More real indeed. For they now possess not only the meaning and associations which they had for

their original hearers, but all the accumulations of emotion, thought, and memory which have gathered round them in their daily use all over the world for two thousand years. We do not measure the greatness of the poetry of the commonplace till we try it by the test I once heard suggested by a great writer : ' Great literature ', he said, ' is that which is found to come home to people who live in times and countries different from those of the poet.' He might, I think, have gone farther and said, ' which is found to acquire additional beauty as it travels into new countries and into the hearts of successive generations of men.' So it is supremely with these ancient commonplaces of religion. What a world of appeal there is for us in ' the Lord is my Shepherd ' which there could not be for those who first heard those words ! That is why it is a fatal and destructive mistake to substitute ' Jehovah ' for ' Lord ' as some modern versions do. To do that is to deprive the psalm of half, indeed much more than half, its power and beauty. It is to substitute the local for the universal, the temporary for the eternal : it is to rob the words of all that they have received in exchange for what during two thousand years they have every day been giving to men and women of every creed, condition and character throughout the vast and varied world of Christendom.

I might find other illustrations in other books of the Bible, but I must pass on. What poet can be more unlike the Hebrew Psalmists than that cool and wise Roman man of the world to whom we owe the poems which have probably been more read and repeated, by men of races and languages foreign to the poet, than any poetry ever written, except indeed that which, like the Psalms, has been taken into official religious use, so that it is read primarily not as poetry at all, but as religion. And yet what is it we most often quote of Horace ? Not his originalities, nor even his most beautiful odes, like *O fons Bandusiae* or *Quem tu, Melpomene* ; but

here again his tags of commonplace, like and so unlike those of the Psalms ; as universal, though on a so much lower spiritual level, and as finely touched to the eternal life of literature. It is not necessary to quote them. I suppose the best known of all are his utterances of those oldest of all commonplaces to which I have already alluded, the inevitable and inexorable doom of death—

> Pallida mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas
> regumque turres,

or

> Omnes eodem cogimur,

or that lovely stanza, almost the most pathetic in all literature :

> Linquenda tellus et domus et placens
> uxor, neque harum quas colis arborum
> te praeter invisas cupressos
> ulla brevem dominum sequetur.

What can be either lovelier as poetry or more commonplace in thought than these tellings again of the thousand times told tale of the shortness of life and its inevitable end ? Or it may be the coming of spring :

> Solvitur acris hiems

or

> Diffugere nives :

or, again, the message of prudence and temperance—

> Auream quisquis mediocritatem,

and

> Aequam memento rebus in arduis
> servare mentem ;

or any of the fifty other things which men have been putting into words that were soon forgotten ever since the world began until Horace came and put them into words that can never be forgotten while the world lasts.

Is not the same thing true of the great Greeks, of Homer,

Pindar, and the three tragedians ? What do we remember best of Homer ? Or at any rate what moves us after we are no longer boys ? Not the fighting or the adventures, I think, not even the very best of the ' moving accidents ' of the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, so much as those ancient commonplaces of life and death with which the two poems abound :

' As is the generation of the leaves so is it also with men. For while some of the leaves are being cast to the ground by the wind, others are budding on the trees and come to life in their turn with the coming of spring : so is it with the generations of men ; one flourishes and another decays.

Or, again, a thing, old and universal and commonplace, like the love of life and last thoughts of wife and child, as we get them in Sarpedon's prayer to Hector :

' Dear son of Priam, suffer me not to fall a prey to the Greeks : but save me, so that some day life may leave me in your city : since it was not to be that I should return home to my own dear land, and delight the eyes of my dear wife and child.'

Isn't it so ? It is with me at any rate. There is nothing so old and unoriginal in Homer as these things, and nothing that gives me so much pleasure.

So, again, what is one of the most striking characteristics of the great Greek lyric poet who has some claim to be considered the greatest of all masters of poetic style ? I hardly dare to speak of these questions in a lecture which is threatened with the dangerous honour of being printed among the transactions of the British Academy. But I believe that I may safely assert that Pindar's eagle flights of splendour scarcely strike or please us more than those simple, almost bald, statements of the commonplaces of ancient wisdom by which he rests himself, or at least his readers who are too often exhausted by the tireless energy of his imagination and the intricate daring of his craftsmanship. Every ode furnishes instances of it. I need only give

one. The most gorgeous, the most daring and highly coloured, of all his stories is perhaps that of Jason and Medea, told in the fourth Pythian Ode ; and he goes straight from its splendours to the wise saw, as timely for the ears of rulers of that day as of our day and of all days.

'It is easy even for a fool to disturb the State, but to fix it firm in its place again is hard indeed, unless there come to the ruler some sudden aid from the gods.'

In this case what we get is simply the restful effect of a plain ancient truth coming after a tale of wonderful adventures. But Pindar has also the other method of using a commonplace, stating it afresh in such original and beautiful language that the old seems new, the commonplace a discovery. So, in the ninth Pythian, one of the grandest of the speeches he introduces in his Odes, the reply of the Centaur Chiron to the question of Apollo about the hero-maiden Cyrene, begins with a magnificent re-statement of the ancient and obvious fact that love is a secret and a mystery.

'Secret are the keys which wise Persuasion holds for the opening of love's holy things.'

There we have the commonplace new-born in that beauty which is the best revealer of truth.

The same thing is notoriously true of the Greek dramatists. Their choral songs are for ever turning from the most adventurous flights of legendary story or lyric exaltation to those old truths of reverence and prudence and the middle way of life, which play so large a part in the religion, ethics, and philosophy of Greece. The famous chorus in which Sophocles celebrated the wonder of man's cleverness and fertility of resource ends with the double commonplace that, clever as he is and wonderful in his ever new contrivances, he has found and can find no escape from death ; and that reverence and justice are the saviours of cities, pride their destruction. And so with the first and second choruses of

the greatest of all Greek tragedies, the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus, each of which I suppose would be generally admitted to be among the possible claimants to the glory of being the most wonderful of all Greek lyrics. The first ends with the commonplace reflection of the impossibility of telling the future : and the second is sown with ancient saws of the certainty of God's judgement on sinners, the blessings of a modest fortune, the dangers of insolence and wealth. I am not forgetting that Greek dramatists sometimes use commonplaces with what, to our ears, seems sheer stupidity. In the *Antigone*, for instance, the Messenger concludes his terrible story of the deaths of Antigone and Haemon with the frigid remark that they prove how much ill counsel is the worst of human ills. And there are many other instances of the same kind. But they do not affect my point. I am not arguing that a commonplace is always great or interesting. That would be absurd. What I am arguing is that, rightly used, commonplaces have constantly been found to be a strength and even a glory of the greatest poetry. And I think that those to which I have been referring, in the great choral songs of the *Agamemnon* and the *Antigone*, confirm my contention. I do not think it can be said that any of them is an anti-climax or anything but an integral and enriching part of the ode. They rest the mind, as Shakespeare rests it with similar quiet sayings of ordinary truth after his tumults of poetry or passion or ingenious and sometimes tortuous intellectualism.

We need these things and find consolation in them, partly because our minds, so much weaker than a great poet's, are easily tired and need the repose of old and accepted things, and partly because we are members of a community, the great family of all mankind, and we soon grow impatient with brilliant individualism and desire something that belongs to us all. All art, as Mr. Gilbert Murray has said, is based on something accepted. Originality is a personal,

an eccentric thing, and generally difficult because it is new. After much of it we find ourselves not only fatigued by the effort it demands, but conscious of a kind of isolation from the human family, a desire to get back to the inherited traditions of our race. This isolation may at first please our appetite for discovery or gratify our vanity, may even give us a sense of helping forward the task of delivering the world from the dullness of conservatism, tradition and routine, but in the end I think other feelings will be found to come over us : we call again for the human, the familiar, the universal : we ask, in fact, to have some universal commonplace given back to us in a new form. After all, a reader is very like an explorer : he cannot stay in the Pacific Islands or the North-West passage which he has been so happy to discover : after a while his heart turns to London or Paris, or some familiar haunt of Brittany or Devon. We honour the poetic voyager and love the traveller's tales he tells us, but in the end we find coming over us a desire for that other work of the poet of which a wise man said ' to enter into life, to make the common things of life more deeply felt and shared in by treating them with simplicity and power, has ever been the function of Genius '

Let me come back from ancient poetry and illustrate what I am urging from the work oi more modern poets. I believe the disregard of the principle I have been suggesting is a conspicuous weakness in much modern verse. Originality and experiment are the salt of art's life : but one cannot make a meal off salt, and the defect of many of our contemporary poets is that they try to make their poems consist entirely of originalities of thought or, far more often, only of language, new tricks of phrase and new experiments in manner.

I am not underrating contemporary poetry. Indeed I think there has not often been a time fuller than the present of true poetic feeling both among those who write and those

who read it. I suppose we are all very grateful to our young contemporary poets. They have kept English poetry alive for us by their sincerity and force : it is scarcely too much to say that they have given it a new birth. For my own part I constantly offer them the only kind of gratitude which they are likely to value, that of reading them again. And the gratitude often increases with each reading. But with regard to a good many of them I confess to a fear that their infant may prove too restless and irritable for long life ; and I rather suspect a child which is so very anxious to be unlike its ancestors. I believe in the continuity of the family and think a healthy child is not more proud of being himself than of finding that, while being himself and therefore a new person, he now and then reminds old people of his grandfather. Who is the English poet most unlike his predecessors ? I suppose Blake. And what is read to-day of Blake ? Not his defiant *Prophetic Books* but his comparatively traditional *Poetical Sketches* and *Songs of Innocence* and *Experience*. It has proved possible, in fact, to incorporate these, solitary and strange as their genius is, into the society of English Poetry : it has, on the whole, not proved possible to incorporate the *Prophetic Books*, and, except by students, they are unread. And poetry which after a century and a quarter is unread except by students may have very great qualities, but it lacks the greatest of all, that of reaching and moving men as men. It is the poetry of a poetic sect, not of the whole family of those who love poetry. So I fear that some of our Georgian and neo-Georgian poets are too entirely set on belonging to one generation, tickling its prevalent taste for crudity of thought and statement, its revolt against morals and authority, against moderation and the middle way, its desire to make all things new and most things violent in art and life, to give one much confidence that they will hold their own in another generation which will quite certainly react from all this. I am inclined to

wish that they had thought more of the sobriety which, as he has told us, has been the ideal of that wonderful stranger who seems to me to be, with a single venerable exception, the greatest living master of English prose; the sobriety in which, as he says, 'there is power and truth and peace'. Sobriety of that sort never wholly surrenders itself to the passions and fancies of its own passing generation. To do that is always an obstacle to permanent fame. I have a great respect and affection for the Victorian era, and I have not the slightest doubt that Tennyson is amongst the most assured and unassailable of our immortals, but it is not what was most Victorian, either in the age or its poet, which is most alive to-day. So I think it would be safe to prophesy that the next generation will think more highly of Mr. Davies, and much more highly of Mr. de la Mare, to mention only two names, than, to mention only one, of Mr. Robert Graves. Mr. de la Mare is of his own generation, of course; but only a little more than he is of all the others. Take such a simple little masterpiece as those lines about the planets which he calls *Wanderers*; or this of *Winter*:

Clouded with snow
The cold winds blow,
And shrill on leafless bough
The robin with his burning breast
Alone sings now.

The rayless sun,
Day's journey done,
Sheds its last ebbing light
On fields in leagues of beauty spread
Unearthly white.

Thick draws the dark,
And, spark by spark,
The frost-fires kindle, and soon
Over that sea of frozen foam
Floats the white moon.

That is what we have all seen and half felt; what our grandfathers have seen before us, and our grandsons will

see after us : new and yet so old ; old and yet, in Mr. de la Mare's hands, so new. It is not of to-day only, or of to-day's thoughts or experiences : and though we hear in it the voice of its own poet that is not all we hear. There are in it other notes which are not of any one man or even of any one race of men. Is it not the greater poetry for that ? Poetry is a timeless thing : it cannot be made out of the life of a moment : if it is it has but a moment's life. But, on the other hand, take Mr. Graves : not at his rare best I admit : but, as every one will admit, in poems as characteristic of him as this other is of Mr. de la Mare. I can only say for myself that when I hear

> Says foolish David, ' Damn your shield !
> And damn my sling ! but I'll not yield '—

I think of what Keats said in the Preface to *Endymion*, and wish that Mr. Graves had shared his modesty about touching a beautiful ancient story and dulling its brightness. And so, when I read

> The trouble is, things happen much too quick ;
> Up jump the Bosches, rifles thump and click,
> You stagger, and the whole scene fades away :
> Even good Christians don't like passing straight
> From Tipperary or their Hymn of Hate
> To Alleluiah-chanting, and the chime
> Of golden harps . . . and . . . I'm not well to-day . . .
> It 's a queer time,

I feel a certain cleverness in it ; and at times I feel there may be sympathy behind all the fidgety verbal gymnastics ; but frankly I don't feel beauty : and, what is equally important, I don't feel timelessness ; I don't feel any day except my own ; the thing is not, it seems to me, poetry, which is of all days, with the past in it and the future as well as the present, but rather descriptive journalism which is so alive this morning that it takes a little experience to know how dead it will be to-morrow. And the method is the method of journalism, which, living on the moment and for the

moment, is necessarily the method of the snapshot. But the method of poetry is not the method of the snapshot nor even of photography at all: it is the method of art, a method as distinct from that of photography which is the statement of momentary fact, as two things can be. A great work of art contains more than the object it represents ever contained at all, and immeasurably more than it contained at any one moment. This new journalistic method, which owes a great deal to Browning at his worst, is an abdication of the true function of poetry. And there is one other thing to be said about it in passing. It is the best of all things to be young. But what healthy youth enjoys is its own life. It is content to be itself, and is not concerned with those who are something else. But in such outbreaks as 'Says foolish David, "Damn your shield, And damn my sling; but I'll not yield"', Mr. Graves is obviously a boy who wishes to show he is not afraid of his maiden aunt. Now poetry is not concerned with maiden aunts at all. And it is just as bad art to write in order to annoy your maiden aunt, as Mr. Graves does here, as to write in order to please her, as Wordsworth and Tennyson now and then did. She ought to be kept out of the case altogether.

But I admit that to-day is of all days the most difficult to form a judgement about. We are inside it and cannot get outside to look all round it. Let us take yesterday, and contrast a poet of yesterday with one of his predecessors a hundred or more years before him. George Meredith's poetry deserves, I think, to be more read than it is. He has left us a few lyrics in which the freshness and the sadness that are mingled in the beauty both of man and of nature are expressed in a form and in language of a beauty and intricacy equal to their own. He has left us four great Odes on what he calls *The Song of French History* which, if certainly difficult, are among the very greatest political poems to be found in any language. And yet this true poet

is little read, and his future fame is of the most uncertain. Why ? Primarily, I think, because he scorned to share the thought or language of other men : because his verse is a tortured maze of fancy and argument, violently alien from the common thought and speech of men ; because that unresting ingeniousness never pauses in the turnings and twistings, coilings and recoilings, of its rope of argument : because it can never say plain things or use plain words. Take a single passage out of that great Napoleon Ode which for intellectual energy and insight it is impossible to overpraise :

> Now had the Seaman's volvent sprite,
> Lean from the chase that barked his contraband,
> A beggared applicant at every port,
> To strew the profitless deeps and rot beneath,
> Slung northward, for a hunted beast's retort
> On sovereign power : there his final stand,
> Among the perjured Scythian's shaggy horde,
> The hydrocephalic aërolite
> Had taken : flashing thence repellent teeth,
> Though Europe's Master Europe's rebel banned
> To be earth's outcast, ocean's lord and sport.

How can a poet expect to be read by more than a faithful few with wet towels round their heads when he insists on writing like this ? What a delight as well as a rest comes to us when we once or twice light upon a passage of ancient commonplace interrupting this torrent of intellectuality.

> Forgetful is green earth : the Gods alone
> Remember everlastingly : they strike
> Remorselessly, and ever like for like.
> By their great memories the Gods are known.

Is not that about the greatest bit of poetry in the four Odes ? If all his work had been like this second passage, or if less had been like the first I quoted, what a different poetic fate Meredith's would have been !

Now contrast with Meredith a poet who may very likely be the most familiar of all in our language. Contrast Gray,

and especially the *Elegy*, which I believe a living poetess, in an unlucky moment for her own credit, called the quintessence of commonplace. The quintessence of commonplace! It is true enough, but not as the critic meant it. I could not ask for anything which better sums up my argument than that hapless impertinence and the poem which refutes it by acknowledging and glorying in its truth. With the possible exception of the *Odes* of Horace, Gray's *Elegy* is, I suppose, of all poems in the world the most signal proof of the great part played by commonplace in poetry. Here is a poem made out of the certainty of death, the vanity of glory, the accidental inequality of the living, the certain and equal doom of the dead, the sadness of parting from the familiar sights and faces—all the oldest of old stories: and yet, when rightly told, they make the most remembered stanzas in the English language.

Let us analyse one or two stanzas of it.

> The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
> The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

The note of the whole poem is struck in the first line. It is to be a poem of evening rather than of morning (though by the way it contains one of the richest single lines about morning in the language), a poem of the country rather than of the town, of melancholy rather than of joy, of death rather than of life. The day is passing away; so is life. That is what it says all through. And what simple commonplace means of saying it the poet takes! The curfew was then the most familiar of sounds as night drew on in the country. It is one of the obvious experiences of a country evening which Milton takes us through in *Penseroso*. The metaphor which interprets an evening bell as tolling for the dying of the day must have been used a hundred times before, from Dante downwards. And what a great line is

made out of these commonplace materials by the art of the poet. How rich in sound it is! 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day': how the bell booms in 'tolls the knell', with its fine combination of sameness and variety, at once echoing the monotony of the bell and remembering that mere imitation is not the business of art: how finely varied are the vowel sounds: how grave and weighty the whole effect of the line! And then the second line with that familiar picture of slow-moving cattle: 'the lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea'; as simply and firmly set on the page as Crome might have set it on the canvas. Then the slow beat of the ploughman's steps, continuous, monotonous, and heavy, suggested by the alliteration and the heaviness of the words: 'the ploughman homeward plods his weary way'. And the final line setting the double note of the poem, at once so intimate and personal, and so conscious of the vastness and mystery which make all personality small and insignificant; 'and leaves the world to darkness and to me'. What a stanza! A tissue of commonplaces; almost nothing in it that might not be dimly thought or stumblingly said by a peasant: and yet here it is, a bit of pure and perfect poetry: the one seed of thought and feeling among all the many thousands sown by all sorts of men and women which has come to perfect flower; the one voice which has found for itself the music after which all those other voices were unconsciously struggling; what every ear at once recognizes as the thing it called for, as the song which gives the whole of what all have vaguely thought and dreamed and felt, the music of the situation as well as its reason, its emotion as well as its understanding, its intimacy as well as its universality, its beauty as well as its truth. A quintessence of commonplace indeed! Would we had another like it in the language!

One might carry the analysis into stanza after stanza. It would be found that it scarcely once aims at anything more

than the giving of new and beautiful utterance to some ancient commonplace. Occasionally it rises to such thought as only a thinker, or certainly at any rate no peasant, was likely to have. It is not likely that the ploughman often dreams even now, and he was still less likely to do so in the time of Gray, that his are 'Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed, Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre'. The rarer, the more daring, thought received from Gray the response of a bolder eloquence; there is here an energy in the motion of the verse, a visible art and elaboration in the words used, an appeal to learning and to associations which could mean very little to the uneducated, which we scarcely find in the stanzas about the cottager's home and daily work, and which are, perhaps deliberately, kept in the main for places where the imagination of the poem gets a little beyond the peasant, as in the stanza about the statues or monuments which he and his cannot dream of having in any Westminster or Canterbury:

> Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
> The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

I will not attempt further illustrations of what is, I am afraid, after all an only too obvious argument. The point I have tried to make may itself be commonplace enough, but I believe that the object I had in view is not unimportant. It all comes in the end to this. Poetry is not an esoteric eccentricity, the affair of a literary coterie, or even of an intellectual caste. It is an affair of men as men. And as such it can never afford to keep very long away from the general experience and common thoughts and feelings of all men. Why is Tennyson a greater poet than Browning? For many reasons, no doubt; because he was a so much greater master of the English language and of the art of verse; because he could labour and wait, reject and compress, as Browning could not: for these and many other reasons. But none seems to me more decisive than the fact

that, though so much less of a man of the world and of society than Browning, and having so much less of that kind of community with his fellow men and of the mobility and variety which it brings, yet of the other kind of community, of the kind which most makes for poetic understanding, he had so much more. Browning's poetry everywhere suffers from its eccentricity, its oddness, its strange circus feats, sometimes of argument, sometimes of manner, such as his perpetual *tours de force* in the way of rhyme which so often spoil his serious poems by their suggestion of the conjuring tricks of comedy. Tennyson has not only a far greater sense of himself as the inheritor of a great tradition, as a torchbearer who has received the lamp of poetry from others and, after holding it for a moment, is in his turn to hand it on, but also a far firmer and more constantly present grasp of the great universal things of heart and mind by which all men live, or at least all men who are likely in these days to read poetry. Let me give one instance. What can be a triter theme than that of sleep as the natural end of day and the symbol of the end of life? But what a new thing Tennyson has made of it in that lovely lyric *To Sleep*, which is less well known than it would be if it were not buried in a play which few people read!

> To sleep! to sleep! The long bright day is done,
> And darkness rises from the fallen sun.
> To sleep! to sleep!
> Whate'er thy joys, they vanish with the day;
> Whate'er thy griefs, in sleep they fade away.
> To sleep! to sleep!
> Sleep, mournful heart, and let the past be past!
> Sleep, happy soul! all life will sleep at last.
> To sleep! to sleep!

How simple it is, simple to obviousness; and yet how perfect! From one point of view there is nothing in it: from another, the whole of life. That is what Tennyson could do with one of the most universal of commonplaces.

And if, as we know, he was sometimes insufficiently aware that a commonplace is dangerously akin to a platitude and cannot be received into the kingdom of poetry without some baptismal new birth of imagination, that, I confess, seems to me a smaller fault than the opposite one of failing to perceive that the commonplace is not the least among the children of that kingdom.

Joubert, himself one of the subtlest of critics, whether of life or literature, complained of 'l'ingénieux sans bon sens' as the bane of letters. 'Oh! qu'il est difficile d'être à la fois ingénieux et sensé.' But that is just the problem of the artist in letters. Nobody denies the side of his problem which I have not discussed to-day. Nobody here, I hope, will suppose that I am indifferent to it, or that I forget that it is even more important that the poet should have something in him which ordinary men have not than that he should have in him something which all men have. Everybody agrees that he must be in some sort ingenious, to use Joubert's word, that he must not speak exactly as you and I speak, but must have a language, a manner, a cast of thought—in a word, a style or 'genius'—of his own, distinguishing him from ordinary men and even from his brother poets. 'The rare epithet—that is what marks the writer,' says another French critic. Yes, and not only the rare epithet but the rare fancy, the rare thought. Every one knows that the poet must have genius and distinction, something separate and indeed unique about him. We may extend Joubert's *ingénieux* beyond what he meant into meaning all that. But there is the other side, the side of which I have tried to speak to-day: the poet must also be *sensé*, must have *bon sens*, what Horace may have meant, or a part of what he meant, by *sensus communis*, which is an instinctive or acquired sympathy with the universal community of the human heart and mind. The old tag which is humanity's best motto, *homo sum, humani nihil*

alienum, must be a word that speaks out of all he writes, as it speaks out of Homer and Shakespeare, and by its more constant and visible presence proclaims them greater men and greater poets than even such giants as Dante and Milton, men of natural powers of mind perhaps equally great, but of a temper so much prouder and harder, so inferior in tolerance, in sympathy, and in universal understanding. The greatest of all writers are those of whom Pascal said that they give us the feeling that in looking for an author we have found a man. Such writers are not afraid to tell a simple truth for fear of being accused of uttering a commonplace : and I have no stronger conviction than that by their simplicity and humanity they deserve well of the Republic of Letters.

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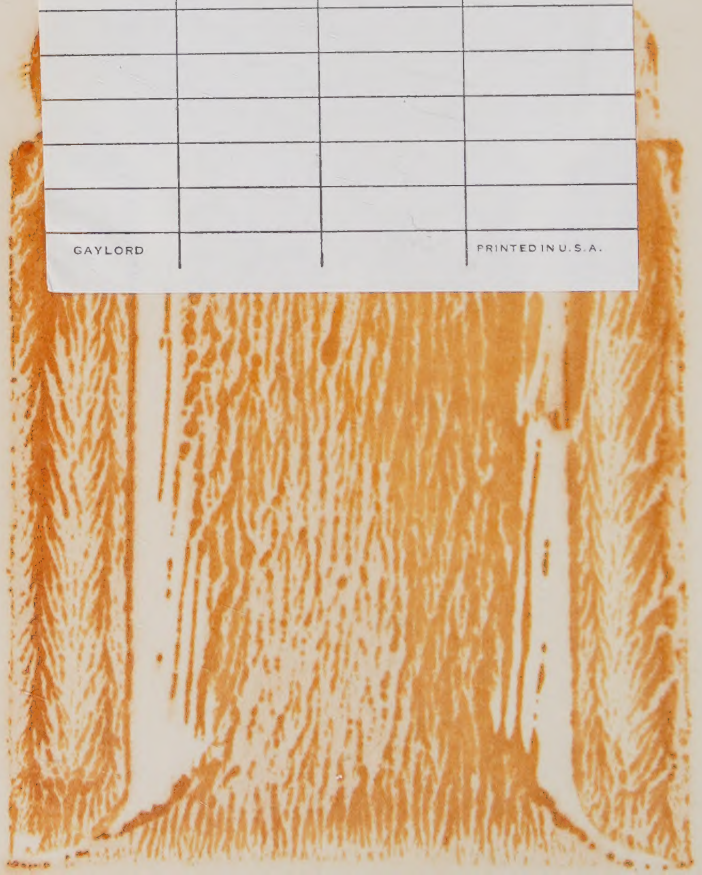

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